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THE CASE AGAINST
THE LLOYD GEORGE COALITION.

“Coalitions have not been popular in this country, and I will tell you why. Those which we best remember were coalitions made between individuals to get a sufficient majority to enable them to hold office, and were made for party and personal aims. A coalition of that kind has always failed, and always deserved to fail, and always will deserve to fail.”

MR. BONAR LAW, in a speech at Liverpool,
on December 19th, 1919.

THE
CASE AGAINST THE
LLOYD GEORGE
COALITION.

BY
HAROLD STOREY.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE CAUSE OF THE BREACH: A NEW TYPE OF COALITION	1
II. THE ARGUMENTS	16
III. FROM THE GENERAL ELECTION TO SPEN VALLEY: JANUARY TO DECEMBER, 1919	37
IV. THE LAST PHASE: MARCH 18TH, 1920	63
V. LEAMINGTON—AND AFTER.	91

CHAPTER I.

THE CAUSE OF THE BREACH : A NEW TYPE OF COALITION.

ON May 7th, 1920, the Liberal Party drew a straight line between itself and the Lloyd George Coalition. Opposition to the Coalition had been both lively and effective for some time previously. But on this seventh day of May there was something that amounted to a ratification, a seal, an oath. Five hundred delegates gathered in the town of Leamington. They represented the Liberal organizations of England and Wales. They were people with authority behind them. These delegates declared that the necessity for a coalition of political parties no longer exists ; they declined the invitation of the Prime Minister to enter into closer co-operation with Conservatives ; and they appealed to all Liberal Associations to maintain the independence of the historic Liberal Party. This utterance has the note of finality ; and the Leamington meeting

will no doubt always be regarded as the occasion of the complete and irrevocable separation of the Liberal Party from Mr. Lloyd George's Coalition.

What is the cause of this separation? The Coalition, with Mr. Lloyd George as its leader, is supported by the Conservative Party, by about one hundred Members of Parliament who still regard themselves as Liberals, and by certain isolated individual Liberals up and down the country. This is a substantial backing. Why does the Liberal Party cut itself clear of this combination and ostentatiously range itself in opposition? What is the Liberal case against the Lloyd George Coalition?

Anyone who honestly seeks an answer to this question will remember that the Liberal Party at one time supported the Coalition; and it will occur to him that if he can put his finger on the moment when it ceased to do so, he may find himself on the track of the causes and reasons. Let us see where this line of enquiry will lead us.

The First Two Coalitions.

The first Coalition Government was formed by Mr. Asquith in May, 1915, and held office until December, 1916. It received the constant support of the Liberal Party. On December 5th, 1916, Mr. Asquith resigned, and Mr. Lloyd

George formed the second Coalition Government, with himself at its head. What was the attitude of the Liberal Party to this new combination? It is significant that its support of the Coalition was not withdrawn at this stage.

On December 8th (the day after Mr. Lloyd George had assumed office) a meeting of the Liberal Members of both Houses of Parliament was held at the Reform Club. In addressing this meeting Mr. Asquith strongly disclaimed any desire to prevent his Liberal colleagues from joining the new ministry, and the closing words of his speech were these :

"Let us, above all, each of us do whatever he can, whether by speech or by action, *by hearty co-operation* to facilitate the task which is before the country now. That is my hope, that is my desire, that is my intention, and I trust it is yours."

At this meeting the following resolution was unanimously carried :

"This meeting records its thanks to Mr. Asquith for his long and magnificent services to the nation, its unabated confidence in him as leader of the Liberal Party, and *its determination to give support to the King's Government engaged in the effective prosecution of the war.*"

A few days later the same resolution was passed by the Executive Committee of the National Liberal Federation.

These pronouncements clear up two important points. They prove (1st) that the withdrawal of

the Liberal Party's support from the Coalition was not prompted by resentment of the intrigues which led to Mr. Asquith's resignation, and (2nd) that it was not due to any personal objection to the Premiership of Mr. Lloyd George. If either of these motives had been sufficient to turn the Liberal Party against coalition, this was the moment to take action. It did not do so. It continued for the new Coalition the support which it had given to the old one.

Following the course of events during the next two years, 1917 and 1918, we do not come upon any material change in the Liberal attitude until the end of the second year. There was, indeed, one somewhat conspicuous occasion when a Liberal vote was recorded against the Coalition Government. On May 7th, 1918, Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, Director of Military Operations, published in the press a letter accusing Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law of making untrue statements to the House of Commons on important matters connected with the prosecution of the war. It has since been established that Sir Frederick Maurice was right, but that does not affect this narrative. The Liberal Party did not at the time commit itself to the view either that the accusations were true or that they were false. It held simply that they were important and should immediately be dealt with, and Mr.

Asquith moved for the appointment of a Committee of the House of Commons to enquire and report. The Government had itself proposed an enquiry by two Judges, but on second thoughts it withdrew this proposal. Mr. Asquith's motion was defeated, and no inquiry of any kind took place.

The Prime Minister chose to treat the "Maurice Debate" as an all-round attack on his administration, and afterwards referred to it as "a Parliamentary conspiracy to overthrow the Government." This was an absurd exaggeration. When a highly placed soldier, actively engaged in the war, sacrifices his own military career in order to warn the nation that it is being misled by the two chief ministers of the Crown, the least thing that can be asked for is an investigation of the charge. This was what Mr. Asquith demanded; and this was what—for reasons best known to themselves—Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law refused.

There is no other incident of this period which even a perverse and partisan mind can twist into an appearance of opposition to the Coalition. The Liberal Party supported every Vote of Credit and every other provision for the prosecution of the war, and it took an active and responsible part in the promotion of the Government's two first-class measures, the Franchise Bill and the Education Bill, which reached the statute book in the year

1918. And then, almost suddenly, we come to the change. The armistice was signed on November 11th and Parliament was prorogued on November 21st; and from this time it can no longer be said that the Coalition was receiving the support of the Liberal Party as a whole. The historian will undoubtedly put his finger on this point, on the month of November, 1918. It is here, he will say—after three and a half years of Coalition, after consistently supporting two Coalition Governments and two Coalition Prime Ministers, it is at this point that the Liberal Party began to cut itself free and to assume an attitude of opposition.

The New Proposal.

What, then, happened in November, 1918, to cause this change in the outlook of the Liberal Party?

For one thing the war was over. The terms of the armistice, accepted by Germany on November 11th, put the enemy in a position which precluded a renewal of hostilities, being in fact so thorough and severe as to amount to unconditional surrender. Many Liberals regarded a Coalition as an undesirable and indeed tainted form of government, only forced upon us by the presence of foreign enemies at our gates. Now that this external danger had completely

disappeared and the Central Empires were known to be broken, helpless, and bankrupt, these Liberals looked with relief for an immediate return to the free expression of every man's real opinions on the public affairs of the nation.

But this was not the only thing. There were many who would have been willing to continue their support of the existing Government if it had proceeded with the peace negotiations without breaking off for a general election. There were some also who would not have rejected a proposal for a new coalition of parties in a new Parliament, in order to complete the peace, if the members of the new Parliament could have been elected on their individual opinions in the usual British way. People whose minds were running in this direction were, however, sharply pulled up on the threshold of the election by an unexpected event. This fresh factor, which at once settled the drift of Liberal opinion, still operates at the centre of the political situation, and it is therefore important fully to apprehend the whole meaning of the new fact at this early point when it first made its appearance.

The thing that happened was an attempt on the part of Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Bonar Law, and other leaders of the Coalition Government, to convert the Coalition into a *Party*. Hitherto the Coalition had been a temporary combination of

separate Parties, co-operating for the achievement of one specific national purpose. It was now proposed to convert it into a pledged combination for all political purposes. Neither of the previous Coalitions had been placed in power by the people *as a Coalition*. In both cases the Coalition consisted of members who had been elected as Liberals, as Conservatives, and as Labour members. They had acted together in these separate capacities for three years, and had done so without serious inconvenience to their separate views of national affairs because the only task in hand was the defeat of a foreign enemy. Now that this special and common task was completed, it was proposed for the first time to ask the country *to elect a Coalition* for the ordinary term of Parliament, giving into its charge not only the conclusion of Peace, but the whole range of domestic legislation and administration for the space of five years. The Government came before the electors as a new entity ; it represented itself—in the Prime Minister's words—as “a team” ; it issued recommendations (it may be remembered that they were called “coupons”) to all candidates who accepted its pledge ; it represented all candidates who rejected the pledge as its “opponents.” No ordinary political “party” could do more. This was not an attempt to unite the nation. It was an

attempt to *divide* the nation on a new issue, the issue, namely, of the Coalition Party against all comers.

Mr. Lloyd George's Tactics.

The details of this enterprise have considerable historic interest. It came into public view in the early days of November, 1918. But Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law had made up their minds on the subject some weeks previously, for it was known at the end of September that the Central Empires were on the point of collapse. On September 30th Bulgaria unconditionally surrendered. On the same day Count Hertling resigned the Chancellorship of the German Empire, and was succeeded by Prince Max of Baden. On October 4th Prince Max appealed to President Wilson for peace. On October 7th Austria made the same appeal. On October 27th both the German Government and the Austrian Government agreed to every condition upon which President Wilson had insisted. On October 31st the Turkish armistice was signed. The meaning of these events was that the war was over, and that within a few days the Government would be able to claim the credit of victory.

Two days, therefore, after the date last mentioned, namely, on November 2nd, Mr. Lloyd

George proceeded to set down in a letter to Mr. Bonar Law the main points of his plan for a "victory" election. This letter was not given to the public until a fortnight later. The most important passage in it is as follows :

"If there is to be an election I think it would be right that it should be a *Coalition Election*, that is to say that the country should be definitely invited to return candidates who undertake to support the present Government not only to prosecute the war to its final end, and negotiate the peace, but to deal with the problems of reconstruction, which must immediately arise directly an armistice is signed. In other words, *the test* which in future must decide whether individual candidates will be sustained at the polls by your supporters and mine must be not, as in the past, a pledge to support the Government in the prosecution of the war, but *a definite pledge to support this Government.*"

This is a perfectly candid declaration of Mr. Lloyd George's intention to convert the Coalition into a political "party," having as its test of membership an unconditional pledge to support the Coalition Government.

On November 12th, the day after the armistice, Mr. Lloyd George met his Liberal supporters at 10 Downing Street. The speech that he made to them consisted chiefly of rhetorical assurances that he had never been anything but a Liberal, and prayed God that he never would be. But the important fact in the

meeting was a resolution which had been prepared for it, and which was unanimously carried. This is it :

“ That this meeting, being convinced of the necessity for a Coalition Government during the coming period of reconstruction, and being satisfied that the programme and policy as stated to-day by the Prime Minister is of such a character as to command the whole-hearted support of Liberals, those present at this meeting *pledge themselves respectively to stand as or support Liberal Coalition candidates with the Prime Minister as their leader.*”

The scheme was now complete so far as Liberals were concerned. As the election developed, Mr. Lloyd George added numerous finishing touches, particularly bringing out the fact that in his view criticism of the Coalition or of himself was a lapse from patriotism. He insisted on having in Parliament “ an army ” who would follow him without criticism or murmuring. “ I tell you,” he said at Wolverhampton on November 23rd, “ what is worse than a small majority : an unreliable majority, a majority that is not quite sure what it will do You cannot march into action if you have got an army that you are not sure will not desert you” And again at Newcastle-on-Tyne, on November 29th, he said, “ The men whom we have appealed to the electorate to support are the men who have given us *constant* support during the last two years—whether Unionist or Liberal.”

Thus was the Coalition presented not merely as a party requiring tests and pledges, but almost as a cult, imposing solemn and binding vows. No loophole was left for the smallest doubt as to the Prime Minister's meaning and intentions. Every Liberal candidate now knew what he had to face. If such a man was unwilling to give the double pledge of unconditional loyalty to the Coalition and to the leadership of Mr. Lloyd George, the whole force of the "victory" Government would be used to defeat him. He might have been for years an energetic Liberal Member of Parliament; he might have fought all through the war, and suffered wounds and privations for his country; he might be opposed in the election by a high and dry Tory; nevertheless, if he refused to utter the Coalition vows, preferring to stand for his own Liberal principles, Mr. Lloyd George would send a letter to the people of that constituency asking them to vote against him and to elect the Tory.

It can cause no surprise that Liberals dissented from a Coalition of this kind and from a Coalition leader who adopted these tactics. Previous to the general election, although there had been criticism and in some minds a good deal of misgiving, there was no general Liberal hostility to Mr. Lloyd George; there was indeed considerable pride in his great gifts and a widespread confidence that he would not forsake Liberalism. If

upon the signing of the armistice he had allowed the Coalition to resolve naturally into its component parts (which was the declared intention of all parties when the first Coalition was formed), if he had been content with an election in which each political party and each candidate would have appealed to the electors honestly on his merits and his opinions, and had left the matter of a further Coalition to be decided in the new Parliament according to the electoral results, Mr. Lloyd George would have retained and fortified the great position which he had long held as a Liberal leader.

But it was impossible to be blind to the astonishing and sinister fact that in this election Mr. Lloyd George was making a deliberate attack on the very existence of Liberalism. He crudely challenged the Liberal Party to accept or to reject his own person. His tactics amounted to this: "There shall be no Liberals in Parliament except those who are bound to *me*." A personal test of this sort had never been set up before; and, by whatever great man it had been set up, it was inevitable that it should be resented as an illiberal challenge and an improper public pose.

Thus, when the question is asked, "What is the Liberal case against the Lloyd George Coalition?" this is the first answer and the fundamental

answer. We go back over the history of the Coalition Governments, and we find that the Liberal Party supported them for three and a half years. At the end of the war, in November, 1918, we come upon the first signs of Liberal dissent, and we see that it was due to a new claim which the existing Coalition set up at that time. Liberals regarded Coalition as a war-time necessity, and expected it to come to an end when the war ended. But, instead of preparing to bring itself to a fitting and honourable conclusion, the Coalition suddenly put forward claims to a fresh lease of life. In doing so, it totally changed its character. It ceased to be a temporary expedient for a specific purpose, and became an organised political body with pretensions to serve all purposes. It invited the country to elect it, as a Coalition, for five years. In other words, the Coalition became a Party, prescribing its test, and proscribing everyone who refused the test. Liberals — with good reason — interpreted the electoral methods of the Coalition as designed to extinguish the separate existence of the Liberal Party, except on the improper and humiliating condition that the Party should crave the protection of one powerful man. They also held the opinion that, for the purposes of peace time, the new Party was an artificial combination, having no basis in common convictions, and that its

access to a prolonged period of power was therefore against the public interest.

For these reasons, in the months of November and December, 1918, the Liberal Party broke from the Coalition, and persisted in maintaining its historic character as a separate and independent political force.

CHAPTER II.

THE ARGUMENTS.

It need hardly be said that this was not the end of the controversy. It was nevertheless the true crisis, and should always be held in view in that sense, for the gist of the subsequent developments is contained in what took place in those last weeks of the year 1918. During the eighteen months that have passed since then there have been important incidents which call for description and comment, and these will be presently taken up in their order.

But meanwhile it seems desirable, without further delay, to examine the chief apology that is made for the Coalition by its own spokesmen. The preceding narrative makes it pretty plain that the new Coalition is something which is bound to be opposed by the Liberal Party. But there must be something to be said for it. On what plea do its supporters seek to justify this new departure in British politics?

The chief apology of the Coalitionists is that *the problems which face the country at the present time are as difficult as those that faced it during the war*, and that these problems cannot be pro-

perly dealt with by political parties, but *need for their solution a united nation represented by a Coalition Government*. In almost every speech that he makes, Mr. Lloyd George deprecates what he calls "party strife," warns us that "the time has not come for it yet," and utters the somewhat vague but unctuous phrase, "This is the time for unity." Mr. Balfour, addressing the Junior Constitutional Club, compared the present time to a "period of convalescence," and went on to defend the continuation of a Coalition Government on the ground that this period "presents very often problems even more difficult of solution than presented themselves in the crisis of the fight with the original malady." With very little variety of phrase this is the stock plea of the Coalitionist: the difficulty of the problems; the impossibility of solving them except as a united nation; the efficacy of the Coalition as an expression of national unity.

The Fiction of "Unity."

Well, it is surely time that this transparent humbug was knocked on the head. Take, first, the fiction of "unity." Not one of the three Coalition Governments has been founded on unity. Each of them was the product either of criticism or of collusion. The only one of the three that had a respectable birth was the first. The

second was the result of a campaign conducted through several months by Lord French, Lord Northcliffe, Mr. Lloyd George, and Mr. Bonar Law, a campaign in which (whatever the motives may have been) the methods used were secret intrigue, dissimulation, and the sapping of public confidence. The third Coalition sprang from an act of collusion between Mr. Lloyd George and the leaders of the Conservative Party, in which each side professed to suspend its political opinions for a patriotic purpose, whereas the real motive, mutually agreed upon in secret, was to snatch an electoral advantage from the moment of our national victory in the war.

The first Coalition was caused by an accumulation of criticism. On May 17th, 1915, Mr. Asquith, who was then Prime Minister of a Liberal Government, wrote to Mr. Bonar Law: "I have definitely come to the conclusion that the conduct of the war to a successful and decisive issue cannot be effectively carried on except by a Cabinet which represents all parties in the State." This was no doubt a true deduction. But what had driven Mr. Asquith to this conclusion? Nothing but the growth of criticism, the threat of public attack upon the Government by Conservatives. This was plainly confessed when Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law explained the situation on May 27th to a

meeting of the Conservative Party. "There have been shortcomings," said Lord Lansdowne, "there have been miscalculations, some of them probably excusable, and some of them perhaps not." And Mr. Bonar Law, having mentioned that until now his party had refrained from attacking the Government during the war, went on to say that the time had arrived when "criticism must come." It was the discovery of this state of conflict that led Mr. Asquith to introduce a mixture of parties into his Cabinet. The Coalition was not formed because there was *unity*, in order merely to give formal expression to an already existing condition of harmony. On the contrary, it was formed precisely because there was *not unity*, because differences of opinion had become so acute and clamant that the Conservative Party could no longer be held in check. A point had been reached when there must either be open discussion and division in Parliament, or a reduction of the critics to silence by representation inside the Government.

And why should there not be open discussion and division in Parliament? It is the answer to this question that probes to the heart of the subject, and pricks the bubble of the present Government's pious pretences. Why should there not be open discussion? For a very good reason—*during the war*. We were engaged in a life

and death struggle with a powerful foreign enemy. The issue of such a conflict did not depend only—although it did mainly—on our actual superiority in arms and skill ; it depended also to some extent on the enemy's state of mind. Whatever encouraged the enemy was harmful to us ; whatever discouraged the enemy helped us ; and it is an accepted military axiom that open Parliamentary discussion and division upon the conduct of the war is the sort of thing that might have created *in the enemy's mind a false supposition of national weakness from which he would have derived encouragement*. This was the reason for Coalition in war-time. It was a military reason. The object was not primarily to secure unity of views ; this has never been secured by a Coalition. What the Coalition achieved was *an appearance* of unity, and this was all that military strategy demanded.

It is self-evident that this almost technical military necessity for the appearance of unity whilst we were at war with a foreign enemy can have no bearing upon national life at the present time. If we were in reality united on the chief questions before the nation, there would not be a word to be said. In that case no one need discuss unity. But the pretence of the present Coalition to stand for national unity is a fiction. At the general election, when the

Coalition was returned to power, 10,700,000 people voted; and of these, 5,800,000 voted for the Coalition, and 4,800,000 voted against the Coalition. Although this is a substantial majority and fully sanctions the formation of a political government based upon it, the figures reveal a state of divided opinion which is not wiped out by the device of calling the government a "Coalition."

But there is a more fundamental point. The truth to be grasped in this connection is that the sort of "unity" which the Coalition fictitiously professes to represent is, in any case, something for which the country has no good use at the present time. Even during the war the suppression of open discussion and the concealment of differences was not in itself an advantage. It is never an advantage. The free acknowledgment of division of opinion is always in the national interest; it clarifies the public mind and opens the way to wisdom. The war itself would have been more wisely conducted if differences of opinion among ourselves could have found more open and genuine expression. It was only in view of the special military consideration which has just been mentioned that, on balance, we chose to deprive ourselves of the benefits of public argument. Why should we any longer deprive ourselves of these benefits? We are now happily free to

reap the advantages of honest argumentative conflict, always a symptom of reality and robustness in public life.

It is difficult to believe that the intelligent members of the Coalition adopt this pose of "unity" ingenuously, most of all when it takes the shape, as it frequently does, of an analogy drawn from the League of Nations. Word must have gone round among the Coalitionists in the spring of this year that the League of Nations was a happy illustration and parallel of Mr. Lloyd George's Coalition, for since then almost every Coalition speaker has woven this alleged resemblance into his peroration. The argument is so wilfully fantastic that two recent examples of it may be put on record.

Mr. C. A. McCurdy, writing in the *Daily Chronicle* of June 1st, 1920, referred to the "amazing inconsistency" of a Liberal Association which was opposed to coalition, but which passed a resolution in favour of a League of Nations. And again, General Seely, speaking in defence of coalition at a meeting of Liberals in Birmingham on May 29th, said: "I think it is foolish to talk about a League of Nations founded on tolerance and mutual respect, without realising that the condition precedent to a League of Nations founded on tolerance and respect is that there should be tolerance and mutual respect among ourselves."

Both these gentlemen are of the best type of Coalition Liberal. How disastrous must be the effect of coalition on the Liberal mind when two such men can utter this feeble nonsense! They speak as though they were being exhorted by the Liberal Party to draw swords and pistols on their Conservative colleagues. Yet this is not the case. It has never yet been suggested that Mr. McCurdy should poison Mr. Balfour's victuals or train a machine-gun on Mr. Bonar Law. The Liberal Association that passed the resolution in favour of a League of Nations asks these gentlemen to treat Conservatives exactly in the same way that it asks the nations to treat each other. The League of Nations is opposed to bloodshed; it is not opposed to honest convictions and strenuous debate. The doctrine of the League of Nations is not that France, Germany, England, Italy, America and Japan ought to hold the same views, or pretend to hold the same views, but that they should thrash out their differences and settle the affairs of the world by argument and by the final acceptance of majority judgment. And the doctrine which is now being upheld by Liberal Associations is that the political parties should settle the affairs of this country in the same way. It is held that to do this openly, to be unafraid of the rational and civilised conflict of debate, each man standing up for his genuine convictions, is more

honest, more in the public interest, and more productive of "mutual respect," than to try to hoodwink the country by an act of collusion, of which the primary object is to win elections and remain in office.

Difficulty of the Problems.

Somewhat briefer treatment will suffice in dealing with the contention that a Coalition is necessary *because of the difficulty of the problems*.

What evidence is there that a coalition of divergent opinions increases executive capacity? At all events it is not a self-evident proposition. It is not a mere question of arithmetic, as though one could say that whilst a simple complaint may be cured by one drug, a really serious disease calls for a combination of several drugs. There is indeed a traditional presumption to the contrary. It is a long time since it was believed that the broth could be improved by a multiplicity of cooks. And certainly no business man would appoint several men of contrary opinions to be joint managers of an important enterprise.

We have now lived under Coalition Governments in this country for five years. What is the verdict of this experience? In the whole period there only emerges one incident from which it might be inferred that a Coalition is specially qualified to deal with difficult and controversial problems

of State. This incident was the passage of the Franchise Act in 1918. Even here there are certain special facts which modify the weight of the evidence. For one thing, the whole situation was forced by the admitted necessity to give votes to soldiers, which inevitably involved giving votes to other people. And, for another thing, the franchise is a subject which particularly lends itself to compromise. It has long ceased to be a question of pure principle, and has become a question of degree. It is a quantitative subject. One party can say to another, "We will give you the simple residential qualification and all elections on one day if you, in return, will forgo the Alternative Vote and leave us a certain amount of Plural Voting." This was, in fact, the sort of thing that happened. But this point need not be over-stressed. The striking fact is that in five years the Franchise Act stands alone as a solitary instance of the capacity of Coalitions to deal with problems of this kind.

This is what might be expected from the nature of the case. Difficulty in public problems, like difficulty in private problems, is best overcome by people who have a clear and straightforward plan. Divided counsels are as fatal in a Government as they are on a battle-field. Given an honest desire to solve the problems of State, and it is easy to solve them in proportion as the responsible Government knows what it wants and

is of one mind. But a coalition is in its nature a self-hindered machine. It is constructed for inhibition. It contains within itself opposite forces which result in neutralising each other. And this is not only what a knowledge of affairs would lead us to expect, it is also what stares us in the face as the actual experience of five years. It cannot be adduced from the facts that even during the War coalition increased our capacity for dealing with difficult problems. It was a very long war; there were innumerable blunders; to adopt Lord Lansdowne's words, there were shortcomings, there were miscalculations. It may be that this was inevitable and excusable; but whatever may be the true judgment on such points, it was a war waged by Coalition Governments. We were at war for fifty-one months, and during forty-one of those months the reins were held by Coalitions. If the war was longer than it need have been, if it cost an unnecessary number of lives and limbs, the responsibility for these miscalculations and shortcomings must rest chiefly on Governments that were Coalitions.

Since the end of the war the notable characteristic of the Government has been its hesitancy, its unsteadiness, its inherent confusion, its inability to take a clear and effective line on any subject. What are some of the "difficult problems" that face us? There is

the problem of Ireland, and here the Government has acted like a true coalition; it has stultified itself by attempting to coalesce opposite policies. It appoints a Liberal to be Chief Secretary and a confirmed militarist to be Lord Lieutenant. After reducing the Irish people to a state of disaffection and confusion which is without parallel, it introduces a Government of Ireland Bill which does not satisfy any single section of Irish opinion, and which will not carry us an inch nearer to the solution of Irish difficulties. The mistakes and follies of the Government's treatment of Russia have been almost entirely due to its hybrid nature. One section of the Government was for conciliation and peace; but another section was for exterminating Russian Bolshevism, on the ground that it might otherwise spread and contaminate countries nearer home. Having thus no clear and settled policy, the Government oscillated and wobbled for more than a year, employing British soldiers in an alien campaign, wasting a hundred millions of British money, and seriously increasing the difficulties of the international situation. The plight of the Government in the matter of international trade and fiscal policy is ludicrous and pitiable. In obedience to one limb of its composite body it drew up and printed and solemnly presented to Parliament an Anti-Dumping Bill—a sadly complicated but unmistakably protectionist

measure. In obedience to another limb the Bill was dropped. But once more, no doubt threatened with dismemberment from within, the Government swings back to the original demand and promises to introduce another similar Bill. Meanwhile manufacturers and merchants are hampered by the necessity to take short views, not knowing whether to expect Protection or Free Trade. Again, in the grave and pressing national problem of the war-debt the Government is without plans and without power because it is without coherence of view. It is well known that there are members of the Government who desire to reduce the debt by a graduated levy on war-fortunes. But there are others who regard this proposal with such fear and hatred that its adoption might endanger the amalgam of the party. The consequence is the usual patchwork compromise which saves everybody's face and accomplishes no earthly good. The Coalition remains intact, and so does the debt.

No one will question the statement that the problems waiting for solution are difficult problems. They are difficult; but they are not new. Coalitionists frequently speak as though the tasks of governments had all been changed. Aided by the almost meaningless word "reconstruction," they throw out the idea that governments are faced to-day by new and novel duties,

mountains of secular and almost elemental tasks that have no relation to the divisions of political opinion. Mr. McCurdy, in the newspaper article referred to above, speaks of "vast arrears of work to be made good before any man has the right to say that the war is indeed over, and that we can afford to turn our minds to old political issues." To be quite frank, these are empty words, used merely to save the trouble of thinking. What is the work upon which the Government has been engaged since the end of the war? What are the problems which it has tried, clumsily and in vain, to solve? Housing, land, foreign trade, debt, taxation, prices, wages, industrial disputes, Ireland, India, foreign relations, armaments. These are not words that have a particularly novel ring. These *are* the "old political issues"; and for the past eighteen months it is to these issues that the Government has "afforded" to "turn its mind"—not, indeed, very successfully, but no doubt with whatever degree of force is within the compass of a coalition.

The problems are the same in substance and kind, though many of them are undoubtedly more difficult, more urgent and critical, than they were before the war. And the fact that the problems are urgent, critical, and difficult is in itself a reason why they cannot be effectively dealt with by a superficial combination of men whose opinions

neutralise and sterilise each other. The first thing that is demanded by our difficult national problems is sincerity. This is not a time for hushing up differences, for the sentimental rhetoric of an unreal unity. It is a time for reality in public affairs. What we want to think about is not the tricks and devices by which a conglomerate political coalition can be kept in office, but the problems themselves, the subjects, the practical solutions. In the case of each problem there is more than one policy that can be applied to it, more than one principle upon which it can be approached ; and what the time particularly calls for is a Parliament that represents the principles which the country desires to see applied to the problems of its own life.

The Coalition's " Liberal " Record.

There is another line of argument, not quite consistent with the one that has just been examined, which is frequently adopted by the Liberal members of the Coalition. Having contended that it is only by a combination of different parties that our present problems can be dealt with, they seem to imply that one of the parties has been inoperative ; for they blandly go on to the assertion that this joint action has resulted in an unprecedented crop of Liberal legislation. " Where have we betrayed Liberal

principles?" Mr. Lloyd George asked, in his speech at the National Liberal Club, on March 26th. "Look," said he, "at the record of our legislation. Take the Liberal Ministries of a generation. They never carried as many democratic measures of reform as we have succeeded in carrying in two or three years."

Now, even if there were any truth in this assertion, it would not justify an attempt to destroy the Liberal Party. Whatever might be the legislative balance of the give and take of a Coalition Ministry in some particular year, common-sense people would still regard the continued independent existence of a Liberal Party as the best guarantee of Liberal reforms. But let us take this claim, frequently made by Mr. Lloyd George and echoed by his supporters, on its merits. Taken on its merits, it is an impudent claim. There is no truth in it.

In the first place, Mr. Lloyd George expands the period over which the test should be applied. The "three years" to which he referred in March, 1920, would carry us back to the beginning of the year 1917. But during the whole of 1917 and 1918 we were still at war; the Coalition Government was a war-government, composed of men who had been elected to the old Parliament on the old party basis; and the Coalition Government of these two years, like all the war-

governments, was supported both officially and in practice by the Liberal Party. It is not upon the work of this period that there is any serious dispute. Serious criticism of the Coalition begins at the point (in December, 1918) when it turned itself into an electoral machine and got itself returned to office *as* a Coalition. Mr. Lloyd George's claim can only be tested by the achievements of his Ministry since then—that is, in 1919 and 1920. The attempt to go further back is not an oversight. It is done with the deliberate intention of including the Franchise Act and the Education Act of 1918. Reference has been made to the Franchise Act on a previous page ; and it is only necessary to say here that whatever credit there may be in connection with these two measures belongs to the old Parliament, and must be fully shared with the independent Liberal Party.

In the second place, Liberal Coalition Ministers, in their eagerness to put a Liberal complexion upon their work, are not quite frank with regard to some of the things that have happened since the general election. Sir Gordon Hewart laid himself out to defend the Government's record in a speech at Leicester, on May 14th, and the *Leicester Daily Post* reports one passage of the speech in these words : " Glancing at some of the things that Parliament had already succeeded in

doing, Sir Gordon said *they had abolished conscription.*" This is a misleading form of speech. Conscription was "abolished" by the time-limit which Mr. Asquith put into the Military Service Acts of 1915 and 1916. The only part played by the present Government was that, when the time approached for conscription to cease automatically last year, they carried (against Liberal opposition) a new Act postponing the date of its termination.

Having put in these important provisory observations, let us see what there is in the Government's record to justify Mr. Lloyd George's flamboyant claim. There is the *Government of India Act*. No one denies that this is a "democratic measure of reform." What is the next thing? There is no next thing. Here, suddenly, having found one Liberal measure, we come to a dead stop. In the speeches of the Coalition Liberal Ministers the catalogue of "Liberal legislation" includes such items as the Housing and Town Planning Act, the Ministry of Health Act, the Ministry of Transport Act, and the Acquisition of Land Act. But this is asking too much. The *Housing Act* is a notorious failure; the *Ministry of Transport Act* is a notorious extravagance; the *Ministry of Health Act* does little more than give a new name and an enlarged staff to the Local Government Board. The *Acquisition of Land Act*

ought to have been an important reform, making it easier and cheaper for public authorities to acquire land for public use ; but in fact it does nothing of the kind. In spite of many amendments moved by independent Liberals, the Government refused to regulate the price of such land by the value upon which its owners pay taxes and rates ; and this Act must therefore be regarded as another concession to landlords. Where, then, are we to look for this Government's Liberal legislation ? The Prime Minister will not direct us to the *Finance Act*, 1920, which repeals his own land-values duties, and even gives back to the land-owners the money they have paid on this account since the duties were imposed by the Budget of 1909. Nor will he ask us to believe in the "Liberal" character of the *Irish Home Rule Bill*, which is repudiated by every Irish authority except Sir Edward Carson. In the legislation and administration of Mr. Lloyd George's Coalition there is much that is reactionary, and still more that is muddle-headed and futile ; but the most thorough search will not discover any further evidences of a Liberal or democratic purpose.

It is an interesting fact that Conservative supporters of the Coalition do not share the view of Liberal Ministers as to its political complexion. Sir William Forster Todd, who is described as

Ruling Councillor of the Milner Habitation of the Primrose League, sees no difference between the Coalition and Conservatism. In addressing a meeting of ladies at York on June 6th the Ruling Councillor said (according to the *Yorkshire Post*) : "In his view the Coalition Government represented all that the Primrose League contended for, and it behoved them to give that Government every support." This in itself is a complete reply to Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Gordon Hewart and the other Liberal Ministers who have been at such pains to prove the Liberal character of their legislation. Its "Liberalism" is evidently of such a kind that Tory officials can innocently mistake it for the policy of the Primrose League.

The truth is that government under Mr. Lloyd George's Coalition is neither honest Conservatism nor honest Liberalism. It has no form nor comeliness ; it is something that has neither name nor character. And this defect is in the nature of the case. The present Parliament does not represent any policy or principle. It cannot do so. No such issue was submitted to the country at the general election. The country was invited to elect a caucus. It is as a caucus, a party without a principle, a combination of persons with no common policy, with nothing to recommend it except the legend that it had won the war—it is

in this character that the Coalition exists to-day. This is the fundamental and fatal criticism of it, that it does not exist to carry out any programme, good or bad, in the practical affairs of the nation ; it exists for its own sake ; its only object is to hold together. In the first instance coalition was a military necessity, a device to preserve, not necessarily unity, but an appearance of unity. Mr. Asquith, under pressure of threatened attack, accepted this solution lest the enemy should be falsely encouraged. But this necessity for coalition has long since passed away. In its later stages it has become a society for the mutual insurance of seats and offices. Just as in the general election certain Liberal candidates could not resist the temptation of a contest in which there would be "no Tory opponent," so at the present time both Liberal and Tory Coalitionists cling to the Parliamentary security which they derive from collusion.

CHAPTER III.

FROM THE GENERAL ELECTION TO SPEN VALLEY :
JANUARY TO DECEMBER, 1919.

WE must now turn back and pick up certain events in the order of their happening.

The Liberal Members of Parliament.

The results of the general election were announced on December 28th. Out of a total of 707 Members, there were 384 Tories and 164 Liberals ; but 131 of the Liberal Members were Coalitionists, leaving only 33 Liberals who were at liberty to represent Liberalism without reference to the Whips of the Coalition. This result was the natural consequence of the action taken by Mr. Lloyd George. He chose to appeal to the country when it was breathing its first sighs of relief after four years of bloodshed. He boldly affirmed that he and his Coalition colleagues had won the war. In almost every case where his party-managers were doubtful whether the Liberal candidate would bind himself to the Coalition, he appealed to the electors, in the character of the war-winner and national deliverer, to vote for the Tory candidate. The consequence was that

nearly a hundred Liberal Members of the previous Parliament were defeated by Tories, and in the new House of Commons there was a clear Tory majority.

A general election which produced these extraordinary results opened up an entirely novel problem for the thirty-three unfettered Liberal Members of Parliament. Could thirty-three Members regard themselves as the Liberal Party in Parliament? When Parliament was prorogued in November, 1918, it contained 260 Liberal Members. Now there were in any case not more than 164, and in the most accurate sense only 33.

The new Parliament was to assemble on February 4th. On February 3rd the Independent Liberals met and considered their position. The decision at which they arrived was in the highest degree momentous to the future of Liberalism. They decided that, whatever else happened, they must act together in Parliament as a separate, competent, and completely organized Party. They did not overlook the fact that the Coalition Liberal Members were greater in number than themselves. But the Coalition Liberals could not be regarded as the Liberal Party, for they owed their election to the organized aid of the Tory Party; they were under pledges to that Party; they were not returned as Liberals, but as

Coalitionists. The little group of thirty-three were the only men who had secured seats in Parliament without any qualification of their Liberalism. Few as they were, therefore, they rightly regarded themselves as the responsible custodians of the Liberal cause in the House of Commons. They were the remnant of an army ; many of their comrades had been slain, many were prisoners in the hands of the enemy ; but this little band was alive and free. It will always be remembered to the honour of these thirty-three Liberals that at this critical moment, when the whole future of politics and of parties seemed so uncertain and dim, they boldly took up their true position and declared themselves to be the Liberal Party in Parliament. At the meeting on February 3rd this ground was irrevocably occupied, and Sir Donald Maclean was elected Chairman of the Party, with Mr. George Thorne and Mr. J. M. Hogge as joint Whips.

Having made their own position clear, the Independent Liberals were open to any reasonable arrangement for co-operation with the Liberals of the Coalition. In February and March many conferences took place between the two groups, and various formulas were suggested with a view to preserving unity and facilitating joint action ; but these efforts failed. It is easy to see now that they could not do otherwise. The Independent

Liberals proposed the following resolution as a basis of agreement :

“ That when a Liberal is duly selected by an existing properly constituted Liberal Association, it is undesirable that a Liberal Member of Parliament should oppose that choice.”

In making this proposal the independent Liberals showed both courage and generosity. It was generous because it cleared the reputation of the Coalition Liberals, who—although they had won their seats by Tory aid—had been, in almost every case, adopted by Liberal Associations. But it was also a courageous proposal, revealing the confidence of the independent Liberals in the rank-and-file members of the Liberal Associations. Although at that moment they had little solid evidence to rest upon, they believed that in the long run Liberalism was safe in the hands of the constituency Associations, and they were willing to abide by the free choice of these bodies.

But the Coalition Liberals declined this test. On March 11th they put forward counter-proposals, one of which was that they should only refrain from opposing the election of such Liberal candidates as were “ willing to give general support ” to the Coalition. This was, of course, an impossible condition ; it brought back the whole anti-Liberal scheme of the general election. At the same time, it was in the nature of the case that the Coalitionists should take this stand.

They were compelled to take it. By their own choice they had bound themselves to the Coalition and were no longer free to act as Liberals.

These negotiations between the two groups of Liberals at the beginning of the new Parliament are important, and have been recorded here, because it was at this point that the Coalition Liberals chose the road which has brought them where they are to-day. From what has been said it is obvious that the independent Liberals put no ban upon them ; there was no proscription ; the doors of the Liberal Party were kept open. But the doors were kept open in vain.

It is no secret that some of the Coalition Liberals were unhappy about their position. The relations they individually bore to the Government and the Prime Minister were by no means all alike. Some of them were men whose chief aim was to get on in the world : at each previous stage in their careers they had consistently stood by those who could give them most. In a crisis of this sort, the choice for such men was easy. There were others who had a natural tendency towards the Coalition attitude, men of diffused sympathies, disinterested but dreamy souls, only too happy to discover a political party apparently based on the assumption that both sides were right and both wrong. There were others, again, who had become Coalitionists

almost by chance, without meaning anything in particular. Some of these were the victims of a local arrangement between the Liberal and Tory officials of the constituency ; others were led into their Coalition bonds step by step, never at any one moment intending to go far. But all these varieties of limited Liberals found themselves at the opening of Parliament entangled in the Government's net. Whatever else they did, they were expected to support the Coalition. Their negotiations with the independent Liberals in the early days of the session were the last despairing gestures of captive men. The failure of the negotiations signified and sealed the completeness of their captivity. From this moment, with very few exceptions, they gradually settled down to the humdrum task of upholding the deeds and words of the Coalition, becoming every day more acclimatised to their surroundings and less sensitive to the appeal of Liberal ideas.

Effect of the Liberal Recovery on Mr. Lloyd George.

Now, the political history of the next twelve months (March, 1919, to March, 1920) is the history of an attempt to develop "coalition" into "fusion." We can trace the progress of this adventure through several well-marked stages.

It was probably at the beginning of the

period that Mr. Lloyd George's mind was turned towards the desirability of closer co-operation. His aim in the general election had been to exclude from Parliament all Liberals except his own personal followers. In this he was so nearly successful that he may be excused if for a few weeks he cherished the illusion that the Liberal Party, regarded as a force independent of himself, was almost extinct, and that only a few more sharp blows were needed to kill it outright. His mind was cleared of this illusion and turned in another direction by a batch of striking Liberal successes at bye-elections.

The first of these was at West Leyton. At the general election in December, Colonel Wrightson, the Tory Coalitionist, obtained a 5,000 majority over Mr. A. E. Newbould, the Liberal. Colonel Wrightson died, and the bye-election took place on March 1st. Mr. Newbould was opposed this time by Mr. J. F. Mason, a notably reactionary Tory. When he was previously in the House of Commons, Mr. Mason voted for the rejection of Mr. Lloyd George's 1909 Budget, and stolidly opposed every measure of Liberal reform. Nevertheless Mr. Lloyd George now wrote to him, wishing him success, and saying that his return to Parliament would "strengthen the hands" of the Coalition Government. Mr. Lloyd George was still in the atmosphere of the general

election, and no doubt regarded himself in this case as administering one more kick, perhaps the very last, to the fainting body of independent Liberalism. But when the result of the election was declared on March 14th, his eyes were opened to a new view of the situation, for the despised independent Liberal had won the seat by a majority of over two thousand. Within the next four weeks there were two other elections. In Central Hull, a constituency always previously represented by a Tory, a Coalition majority of 10,000 at the general election was converted by Lieut.-Commander Kenworthy into an independent Liberal majority of 917. In Central Aberdeen, where the result was declared on the last day of April, Major Mackenzie Wood captured the seat from the Coalitionists, in spite of the fact that he was opposed by both a Tory and a Labour candidate.

These events fell upon Mr. Lloyd George like a cold douche. They showed him that there were still great masses of electors who would vote for independent Liberal candidates; that the Liberals of the country were not, as he fondly hoped, meekly falling into line behind his commanding figure. Profiting by this early and convincing lesson, he now gave up the idea of shepherding the whole Liberal public into his own fold. He recognised and accepted the fact that there would

remain in any case a substantial body of Liberals who cared more for principles than for persons ; that there was, in fact, a Liberal Party—an independent Party, outside his control, and moving on its own lines—to be reckoned with. He therefore turned his attention to a new adventure. As far back as the year 1910, in the midst of the struggle over the Parliament Bill, Mr. Lloyd George had made secret overtures to the Tory leaders with a view to the formation of a joint Liberal and Tory Party. He now revived this old project in a new form. He had 130 Liberal Members of Parliament at his beck and call ; he believed himself to be personally indispensable to the Tory Party ; the thing to do, therefore, was to go to the Tories with these assets in his hand and make a bargain. The Coalition should be converted into a permanent organization, a new movement expressive of the new national spirit which had sprung out of the war, equipped on the one hand with the solid strength of the Tory numbers, and on the other hand with the histrionic electoral properties of Lloyd-George popularity.

Mr. Churchill's Advertisement.

The first venture in the public ventilation of this scheme was made by Mr. Winston Churchill, who addressed a meeting of Tory and Liberal

Coalitionists at the Criterion Restaurant, on July 15th. The subject of the speech was "A Centre Party." "Party spirit," said Mr. Churchill, "party interests, party organization must in these very serious times be definitely subordinated to national spirit, national interests, and national organization." He argued that there was "no deep division of principle" between the two sections of the Coalition, and that they could therefore continue to act together as they did in the sternest days of the war. "I have told you," he said, with pleasing self-effacement, "about my friend, Mr. Lloyd George, who really is the most necessary man this country has had for many years. . . . He is seconded by Mr. Bonar Law, who has never had a thought for himself, and who has played a brilliant part as Leader of the House of Commons, and who works in devoted comradeship with a political chief whom he has learnt to trust and like."

This speech was not published until ten days after it had been delivered. But on the day after the meeting (July 16th) the newspapers gave great prominence to the occasion as the inaugural function of a new Centre Party. Sir George Younger, the chief organizer of the Tory Party, and Captain F. E. Guest, the chief Liberal Coalition Whip, were present at the meeting, and both expressed their warm approval of the

proceedings. Captain Guest, according to the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Telegraph*, declared that he had now "burnt his boats"—whatever that may have meant; and Sir George Younger, on his own authority, said that he hoped to see a new Party formed on the foundations of the present Coalition. During the next few weeks the words "Centre Group" were gradually substituted for "Centre Party." It was no doubt felt that enough had been said for the time being, and that the subject might be allowed to simmer. We do know now, however, that Sir George Younger treated the matter in a serious and practical spirit. He has since told us (in an interview published in the *Evening Standard* on January 13th, 1920) that in the month of October he addressed a private official letter on the subject to the chairmen of all the Conservative Associations, in the course of which he used these words, "I have always personally entertained the hope that the present Coalition would form the foundation of a permanently fused Party."

Spade-work by Mr. Lloyd George.

This was the first stage of the journey towards "closer co-operation." It was not intended to be more than an advertisement, a propagandist trial-

run for the new idea. The next movement was a defensive action fought by Mr. Lloyd George single-handed, with that courageous disregard of fact and reason which has often characterised him.

This defensive movement consisted of a speech delivered in Manchester on December 6th. It was preceded and no doubt prompted by evidences of revived activity in the Liberal Party. All through the year the independent Liberals had been gradually feeling their way back to confidence, and in the month of November public utterance was given to their view of the party situation which rang with a new note of definiteness. The National Liberal Federation had so far walked very cautiously, with self-restraint, taking the utmost care not to tread on the toes of any species of Liberal. There was a desire to avoid as long as possible any word or act which might make it difficult (as the phrase went) for Coalition Liberals to re-claim their independence.

But when the Federation held its annual meetings in Birmingham on November 27th and 28th, it was evident that this prolonged restraint was breaking down under the necessity for true and plain speech. There had been by this time eleven months' experience of the Coalition. Its finance, its fiscal policy, its foreign policy, and its land policy had rasped harshly on Liberal minds ;

and there was the humiliating fact that in these reactionary tendencies the Government had been supported by Members of Parliament who still described themselves as Liberals.

It was impossible that tenderness for the feelings of Coalition Liberals should be carried any further. Accordingly the National Liberal Federation resolved to come out with the truth whatever might be the consequences. The annual report of the Executive Committee severely attacked the policy of the Government, openly characterised it as Toryism, and concluded with the following candid passage :

“Thus are the winding cords of Conservatism and reaction being slowly tightened upon the nation. It is a process that cannot be allowed to go on. If we are to be delivered from this combination of muddle and misdirected energy, it will only be by a revival of Liberal ideals in the minds of the people. . . . *And Liberalism can only be effective when Liberals are resolved to act together in independence of all other political parties or groups. . . .* Our advice is that every Liberal Association should jealously guard its independence, *and should without loss of time cause it to be clearly understood that at the next election its countenance and support will only be given to a Liberal candidate who is independent of other political ties and claims.*”

In connection with these meetings Mr. Asquith addressed a great demonstration in Birmingham on November 28th. He emphasised the same point, and added a direct appeal to Coalition

Liberals to return to their old Party. "My message to-day," he said, "to all Liberals from top to bottom is to cut themselves loose before it is too late from these enfeebling and enslaving bonds. . . . We are not, and we do not intend to be, a wing either of the Tory or Labour Parties. We are Liberals carrying on the traditions and the policy of a great historic party, never more needed than it is to-day. And we call upon our fellow Liberals throughout the length and breadth of these kingdoms—everywhere—to cut themselves free and join us in our march."

These utterances were symptoms of increasing assurance and vigour in official Liberal circles. Liberals throughout the country responded cheerfully to the new note; and the total effect of the Birmingham meetings, which had been crowded and enthusiastic, was to make Liberalism and the Liberal Party look much more attractive than they had looked for some time past.

A week later (on December 6th) Mr. Lloyd George spoke at Manchester with this fact in his mind. His object was to shore up the defences of the compound in which the Coalition Liberals lived, and to refurbish the theory that this compound was a respectable, honourable, and patriotic enclosure. To this task he applied himself with a great deal of art: the art, on the one hand, of making smashing replies to things which nobody

had said, and on the other hand, of keeping strict silence upon the real points at issue.

Apart from its clever chaff and persuasive irrelevancies, the speech consists of three pleas. In the first place Mr. Lloyd George offers excuses for having caused division in the Liberal Party. But (and this is where the art comes in) what he excuses is not the thing that matters. He goes back to November, 1916, and gives an elaborate and inaccurate account of the circumstances in which he broke up Mr. Asquith's Coalition Government and secured the Premiership for himself. It is not necessary to discuss the disingenuous character of this explanation (which has been exposed elsewhere), because it was not at this point nor on this account that the Liberal Party became divided. The Liberal indictment of Mr. Lloyd George is not that he snatched the reins of the War Government into his own hands. Let that pass. Almost any political fault committed during the war can be excused, if not forgiven. The disruption of the Liberal Party took place at the general election in 1918; and for the wanton and destructive part which he played in this catastrophe Mr. Lloyd George has no excuse to offer.

The second plea of the Manchester speech is that "the time for party conflict has not arrived," and that the country's problems can be solved

most "thoroughly," "effectively," and "speedily" by the Coalition. This bare assertion, so often made by Coalitionists, is not supported by fact. It has been answered at length in an earlier section (pages 24-30), where it is shown that the mixture of policies and principles in a Coalition operates in practice almost invariably against both efficiency and speed. As to "party strife," it is in any case a question-begging phrase. The honest political conflict of different opinions is not "strife" in the objectionable sense which this expression is intended to suggest. But there is nothing less sincere in the new jargon of coalition politics than the use of this phrase. When have we had more "party strife" than during the past eighteen months? What is the Coalition itself but one of the "striving parties"? And what has contributed to the creation of "strife" so much as Mr. Lloyd George's "coupon" tactics at the general election? If the 45 per cent. of the voters who opposed the Coalition in the general election are to be described as wranglers, disputers, promoters of arid faction, by what magic do the 55 per cent. who supported the Coalition escape the same description? Does the possession of a 10 per cent. majority translate a "party" government into a "national" government? It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Mr. Lloyd George uses this expression with his tongue

in his cheek, flippantly assuming that most people will swallow it without examination.

The third point of the Manchester speech is that in any case "coalition is inevitable." "I cannot see a Parliamentary majority," Mr. Lloyd George said, "unless some party is going to coalesce with some other party." He probably forgot for the moment that the Conservative Party had at that time, as it still has, an actual majority of more than sixty over all parties in the House of Commons. Coalition is not inevitable at this moment. No man can say that it will be inevitable in the next Parliament. There may be a majority of Liberals, or of Conservatives, or of Labour Members. But the head and front of Mr. Lloyd George's offence against political honesty is that he did not wait for the election to prove whether any one of the straightforward parties could secure a majority and a mandate from the people. He decided upon coalition before the election.

And he did so with a clear knowledge of the disabilities that belong to coalition. In this very speech he says, "If you coalesce with some party it means that you join forces with some party, of a part of whose political creed you profoundly disapprove, exactly as they disapprove of part of yours. It is the essence of coalition." A junction of forces involving this unnatural and violent mix-

ture of political creeds can only be tolerable if it is inevitable, and if its object is to carry out some one specific and urgent task upon which the diverse parties happen to be agreed. It is common ground that this was more or less the case during the war. But in December, 1918, there was no such situation. The country was asked to elect a Parliament for five years, giving it power to deal with every kind of public business—as the present Parliament is now doing. With this prospect before him, Mr. Lloyd George prejudged the question of whether “coalition” would be “inevitable.” He himself made it inevitable. He “joined forces” with a political party—not to defeat a foreign enemy, not for any pressing national necessity, but for the ordinary purposes of home affairs—he joined forces with a party of whose “political creed he profoundly disapproved.”

For what reason was such a junction of opposing forces made at such a moment? Why were “political creeds” jettisoned by both parties to the contract? There is only one theory which yields a satisfactory answer to these questions. It was logical and reasonable to decide upon coalition at that time, in spite of “profound disapproval” on both sides, *if the object of both parties was to retain office.* Otherwise the compact was unintelligible.

Spen Valley.

Mr. Lloyd George's speeches usually produce, at all events for the time being, a grateful and comforted feeling in those who are anxious to agree with him, for he is probably the most expert window-dresser who has ever appeared in British politics. To the general Liberal public they are mystifying, as they are no doubt intended to be. But whatever may be the influence of these oratorical conjuring tricks, there is no uncertainty about the effect that was produced by the incident which falls to be mentioned next in this narrative.

This is the Spen Valley bye-election.

Whilst Mr. Lloyd George was verbally deprecating "party strife" in Manchester, he was actively provoking it in the Spen Valley. It is important that the bare facts of this incident should be recorded. It was the first occasion subsequent to the general election on which Mr. Lloyd George and his Coalition Liberal advisers introduced a candidate of their own choice in deliberate opposition to the wishes of the local Liberal Association. Captain F. E. Guest (the Chief Coalition Liberal Whip) gave a totally untrue version of the facts to a meeting of Coalition Liberal Members in London on December 8th. The *Daily Chronicle* (a Coalition newspaper) reports Captain Guest as having said

that the Spen Valley Liberal Association first invited Colonel Mowatt, a Coalitionist, to be their candidate; that whilst Colonel Mowatt was considering the matter "certain members" of the Association invited Sir John Simon to visit the constituency; that another meeting of the Association was then held; and that acting on a majority vote of 32 to 22, Sir John Simon was adopted. Every one of these statements is untrue. No one invited Colonel Mowatt to be the candidate, and the Association did not communicate with him in any way. Sir John Simon was first approached by an official committee, acting on instructions. He did not visit the constituency until he went to address the full meeting of the Association, which adopted him unanimously.

The exact order of events was as follows. (1) A few days after the death of Sir Thomas Whittaker (which created the vacancy) two of the officials of the Spen Valley Liberal Association had a private conversation with Colonel Mowatt, in which they discussed the possibility of his contesting the seat. The two officials were not authorised to see Colonel Mowatt. They were his personal friends, and the conversation was entirely informal, private, and non-committal. (2) On November 15th, several days subsequent to the conversation just mentioned, the Executive Committee of the Association met to consider the vacancy.

This was the first official and authoritative Liberal act since the death of the Member. A resolution was moved, appointing a Selection Committee and instructing it to bring before the Association a Liberal candidate who would give support in Parliament to Sir Donald Maclean. This resolution was proposed and seconded by members of the Executive who did not hold office. Some of the officers opposed it, arguing that the Selection Committee ought to be left free to recommend any suitable Liberal, without further qualification. The resolution was ultimately carried by 32 to 22.

(3) The Selection Committee proceeded to carry out its instruction. The first and only man approached by the Committee was Sir John Simon, who agreed to address the Association.

(4) On November 22nd a meeting of the whole Association was held. It was a large meeting—said by the President to be the largest he could remember in an experience of twenty years. The meeting received a report of the proceedings of the Executive and of the Selection Committee, and was informed of the presence of Sir John Simon. Sir John Simon then addressed the meeting, and by an absolutely unanimous vote was adopted as Liberal candidate. (5) On November 29th a meeting was held in the Spen Valley for the purpose of adopting another candidate. This meeting was called at the instigation of the

Coalition Liberal Whips, and was attended by Sir Hamar Greenwood on their behalf. Only two or three known Liberals of the constituency were present. The rest were Conservatives. The President of the Spen Valley Conservative Association took the Chair. The meeting adopted as a "Coalition Liberal" candidate Colonel Fairfax, who frankly declared that he had no politics, although—he was free to admit—his Conservative friends credited him with "Liberal tendencies." When the contest began Mr. Lloyd George wrote the usual letter of recommendation, and the whole available staff of the Coalition Liberal headquarters were sent to the Spen Valley to work for Colonel Fairfax. The election-agent was the agent of the local Conservative Association, and Colonel Fairfax was supported by that Association exactly as if he had been an ordinary Conservative candidate.

There is no exaggeration in saying that this incident shocked the political feelings of the Liberal Party throughout the country. Mr. Lloyd George, in defending his interference three months later, sought to discredit the representative character of the Spen Valley Liberal Association. But no excuse can be found in this direction. It was an ordinary, well-organized, well-sustained Association; it had not been allowed to lapse during the war; and the meeting which unani-

mously adopted Sir John Simon was composed of elected delegates from every part of the constituency. Scores of Liberal Associations in other constituencies went to the trouble of calling meetings and publishing protests against the action of the Prime Minister and his Chief Whip. They felt that if this could be regarded as permissible conduct on the part of Coalition Liberal leaders, every local Liberal Association was threatened with disruption.

The Spen Valley bye-election marked a critical stage in the history of Mr. Lloyd George's Coalition. Many Liberals who had clung to their old thoughts of Mr. Lloyd George as long as possible now sorrowfully accepted the truth. The Coalition was revealed as a purely partisan movement, factious and self-regarding, willing to use Tory organizations or indeed any other instrument in order to destroy Liberalism, containing in itself no positive aim or principle except the desire to perpetuate its own power. From this time forward it became a generally accepted axiom among Liberals that such a Coalition must be attacked in all circumstances and in every place.

Reconnoitring by Lord Birkenhead.

Reference must be made to' one other small but interesting episode before we come to the

final series of events in which the evolution of the Coalition reached its climax.

Lord Birkenhead published in the *Weekly Dispatch* of January 11th and January 25th, 1920, two articles on the prospects of the Coalition. His main thesis was that the Labour Party was preparing to "carry out schemes of Socialism which would destroy in twelve months the whole fabric of British credit," and that a powerful national party was necessary to combat and defeat this nefarious intention.

Where was such a party to be found? It was not found, he said, in "an invertebrate and undefined body such as the present Coalition." The Coalition had passed successfully through many great crises in the twelve months that followed the armistice, but it would prove to be "an ineffective instrument for the purpose of fighting our English Communists." The weakness of the Coalition which troubled Lord Birkenhead was of the same kind as that which had already been mentioned by Mr. Bonar Law, and was afterwards emphasised by Mr. Lloyd George. This was the fact that although "fusion" had been practically achieved in Parliament, the party had no unity or cohesion in the constituencies. "The leaders," said Lord Birkenhead in his second article, "have in reality effected a fusion of view, but no simplification or adaptation has been at-

tempted of their pre-war equipment in the country. Where there should be unity in the constituencies, alike of organization and effort, there is disparity and misunderstanding. Where there should be one organization, there are two." The cure for this weakness was the thorough organization of the two wings of the Coalition into one compact party. In Lord Birkenhead's own words: "It is, therefore, axiomatic that if the Coalition is to remain powerful it must organize itself." "The formation of a National Party is, in my judgment, indispensable." It might be called, he said, a National Party, a Constitutional Party, or a People's Party.

There can be no doubt that this deliverance was a conscious and approved part of the publicity campaign which Mr. Lloyd George and the Conservative leaders were conducting. The two articles attracted a great deal of attention, and there was criticism from various types of Coalitionists. But Sir George Younger, the Chairman of the Conservative Party, clearly stated his approval of the first article. In an interview which he gave to the *Evening Standard* on January 13th (referred to above), Sir George Younger quoted from his letter to the Tory Chairmen, "I have always personally entertained the hope that the present Coalition would form the foundation of a permanently fused Party," and

added, "I still entertain that hope." And a reference to the speech which Mr. Lloyd George made on March 18th to the Coalition Liberal Members reveals a striking similarity, amounting almost to identity of phrase, between the doctrine of that speech and the main points made by Lord Birkenhead. The menace of a militant socialism, the necessity for a national party to withstand it, the disunion of Coalitionists in the constituencies, the remedy of organization and closer co-operation between the two wings: these are the threads upon which the argument was strung in both cases.

Lord Birkenhead's articles in the *Weekly Dispatch*, received by some with irritation and by others with incredulous laughter, were nevertheless a deliberate and authorised forecast of what was in the Prime Minister's mind.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST PHASE.

MARCH 18TH, 1920.

WE come now to the last phase. It occupied exactly three months. It began with the Paisley bye-election, in which the poll was taken on February 12th, and ended with Mr. Lloyd George's self-complacent letter, which was read on May 11th at the funereal meeting of Coalition Liberal Members in the Central Hall, Westminster. The crisis of the phase, which was also the crisis in the whole process of Coalition development, came midway in this period of twelve weeks when Mr. Lloyd George addressed the Coalition Liberal Members on March 18th.

The position of Liberal Coalitionists at the end of January should be clearly realised. Twelve months' experience had now supervened upon the brilliant success of Mr. Lloyd George's tactics at the general election. There had been time to complete the destruction of the Liberal Party, the task attempted at the general election; on the other hand, there had been time to repent. Neither of these things had happened. The independent Liberals had won seats from the Coali-

tion; they had given evidence of mass strength at the Birmingham meetings of the National Liberal Federation; and it was now clear to Mr. Lloyd George and his friends that, although there were few independent Liberal Members of Parliament, the independent Liberal Party in the constituencies had not been broken up or even seriously disorganized. On the other hand, Mr. Lloyd George had given no sign of repentance. He had not taken a single step nor spoken a single word during the twelve months which could give the smallest encouragement to those people who believed that he would some day resume his devotion to the Liberal cause. His practice of backing Tories against Liberals in bye-elections had continued, and had culminated in the open disdain of local Liberal feeling in the Spen Valley incident.

It is always to be borne in mind that Mr. Lloyd George and his immediate circle of supporters look upon public life primarily as a field for Lloyd-George activity. Their course of action—both theirs and his—is determined by the degree of scope which it promises to give to the central figure. If Mr. Lloyd George had either killed Liberalism or re-embraced it, things would have been different. In the latter case he would have become once more a leader in a great established party; and in the former case

he would have stepped into the shoes of the dead cause, finding ample room for a party based on unadulterated devotion to his own personality. Since the course of events during the twelve months that followed the general election did not throw up either of these simple solutions, it was necessary to provide scope for the Prime Minister's future energies by some other means. The third obvious plan was to instal Mr. Lloyd George as leader of the Conservative Party, saving the faces of sensitive politicians in both wings of the Coalition by inventing a new party name. We have seen that steps were taken from time to time during the year to prepare the way for this development. It is perhaps doubtful whether there were more than a dozen Coalition Liberal Members who knew the extent to which the plans had matured ; but by this time Mr. Lloyd George's own mind was made up. This is where we were at the end of January, 1920.

Pathetic Cries of Coalition Liberals.

In the last week of January Mr. Asquith went to Paisley for the bye-election contest. Polling took place on February 12th. The result was not declared until a fortnight later, but it was well known at the time of the poll that Mr. Asquith's prospects were very bright. On February 18th

the Coalition Liberal Members held their sessional meeting in the House of Commons, and it was evident from the speech of their chairman, Mr. George Lambert, that the probability of Mr. Asquith's return to Parliament was very much in their minds. It was felt by some of these gentlemen that this event would embarrass them. It was not that they regretted Mr. Asquith's return. On personal grounds they honestly welcomed it. But they were the sort of men who attached more importance to leadership than to their own political convictions. They understood what it was to have a leader ; it helped them to define their own position, and they liked to think of themselves as useful followers in a well-led brigade. Now, some of these ardent disciples were still in the habit of referring to Mr. Asquith as the leader of the Liberal Party, although they had acknowledged Mr. Lloyd George as their leader by formal resolution at the time of the general election. This was well enough whilst Mr. Asquith was outside Parliament : they could quite comfortably think of themselves as having one leader in the House of Commons and another leader in a vague and general sense outside. But what would be the state of their tortured souls if Mr. Asquith came inside ?

These embarrassments found pathetic expression in Mr. George Lambert's speech :

"The Liberal Associations of the country to-day," he said, "are perplexed and perturbed. They want guidance. We must give it them, but *before we can do so we must ourselves know where we stand* and where our leaders stand. The time has come for a frank interchange of opinion. I suggest, therefore, that all Liberal Members of Parliament, Coalition or non-Coalition, should *invite the Prime Minister to tell them, at an interview, exactly how he stands with regard to Liberalism and the Liberal Party.* I hope that Mr. Asquith may be by that time a Liberal Member of Parliament, and that he too would attend such a meeting, so that we lesser Liberal lights may know where we stand and where our leaders stand."

Perhaps this is the most pitiful passage ever uttered in a political speech. It is like the sobbing of a lost child. These experienced elderly men, some of whom had been in Parliament for many years, did not know "where they stood." They must needs beg of Mr. Lloyd George to come and explain to them "where they stood." They were evidently not in Parliament to support principles or to advocate a policy. They appear to have been sent to Parliament in order to find some one to "follow." And even this they could not do for themselves. They could only ask for guidance. "Come you," they cried, "and come you, and tell us plainly whom we are to follow." This must be the last stage of humiliation to which politics can be reduced.

But, whatever may be thought of the men

who lifted up this pathetic wail, the incident had its consequences. Eventually Mr. Lloyd George heard their cry. He came to them and told them what they wanted to know ; for it was in response to a resolution passed by this meeting that the Prime Minister delivered on March 18th the speech which finally settled the future of the Coalition.

The Moment for Action : Press Announcement.

Meanwhile other forces were at work. On February 25th it was announced that Mr. Asquith had been elected for Paisley. Mr. Asquith received 14,736 votes ; his majority over the Labour candidate was 2,834, and his majority over the Coalitionist was 10,941. This decisive event, the anticipation of which had flustered the humbler Coalition Liberals, now undoubtedly stimulated Mr. Lloyd George to action. Everything had been ready for some time. Lord Birkenhead and Mr. Churchill, aided by the *Observer* (with which they were in close co-operation), had published piecemeal all the essential features of the scheme. Nothing was wanting but the appropriate moment to carry the scheme into operation, and it was judged that this moment had now come.

What may be called the public exhibition of Mr. Lloyd George's new Coalition or Fusion tabernacle took place during the seven days from

Saturday, March 13th, to Friday, March 19th. The structure of the tabernacle underwent some hurried and temporary alterations after the exhibition had begun, the nature of which will appear as we proceed ; but at the end of these seven days the mists of secrecy and uncertainty had rolled back, and the new political contours stood out for all to see, like mountains against a clear sky.

The proceedings began with an article in the *Morning Post* on Saturday, March 13th. The *Morning Post* has consistently fought against the idea of Fusion from the Conservative side ; and the article of March 13th, based on early information cleverly obtained by its political correspondent, was designed to sound the alarm.

“ Arrangements are believed to be in contemplation,” said the *Morning Post*, “ if they have not already been made, for a meeting of the Unionist Party at the Carlton Club, to which Mr. Bonar Law will propound a scheme for the amalgamation of the two wings of the Coalition into one party under the leadership of Mr. Lloyd George. Necessarily this would be accompanied by a meeting of Coalition Liberals, when the Prime Minister would lay the plan before his followers.”

This turned out to be perfectly true, with the immaterial difference that Mr. Bonar Law’s speech was made at Worthing to a meeting of the Sussex Conservative Union. The writer goes on to a criticism of Fusion with which we are not concerned, but the following sentences may be pre-

served for the sake of their description of the nature of the proposal :

“It is not merely co-operation for one general election. but a permanent combination. . . . Thus apparently is the long-talked-of fusion to be brought about—though fusion is hardly the proper word to employ to describe a process which is really the absorption of what may be left of Coalition Liberalism by the Unionists. This absorption would, of course, be disguised by giving the new party a new name, yet undecided.”

The *Observer*, unlike the *Morning Post*, was in the confidence of Mr. Lloyd George’s intimate colleagues ; and on the following day (Sunday, March 14th) it affirmed, with this authority behind it, what had already been shrewdly predicted. According to this well-informed oracle, the whole matter was settled. It is only necessary to quote here a few lines expressing this view :

“Everything else in politics,” said the *Observer*, “is overshadowed by the arrival of the decisive moment for the Prime Minister’s whole future. *He has determined to convert the Coalition into a fusion—to weld the two metals into one.* . . . For it has happened. We are out of all the vague of mere speculation. As regards main matters the thing is done. . . . This is obviously one of the big personal events in British political history, and a landmark in party annals.”

The significance of these quotations from the heralds who proclaimed Mr. Lloyd George’s purpose in advance, is that they plainly refer to his *whole* purpose as it existed in his mind and the

minds of his colleagues at the beginning of this fateful week. The arrangement was that the Prime Minister should meet the Liberal members of the Government on Tuesday, March 16th, and the whole company of Coalition Liberal Members of Parliament on Thursday, March 18th. In the interval between Sunday and the first of these meetings there were two issues of morning newspapers, on Monday morning and Tuesday morning. The revelations made by the *Morning Post* and the *Observer* on Saturday and Sunday thus got two days' further publicity, and the whole country was familiarised with what was afoot. Some of the newspapers sent their interviewing reporters to and fro collecting the opinions of party officials in various counties and constituencies, and it was evident that the words "fusion," "amalgamation," "permanent combination," had set up feverish symptoms in a good many Coalitionist minds.

Mr. Lloyd George and the Liberal Ministers.

When Tuesday evening came, therefore, and the twenty-five Coalition Liberal Ministers assembled to hear Mr. Lloyd George, his ear was already upon the ground. No official report of this meeting was given to the Press; but one or other of the twenty-five Ministers (unless it was one of the Prime Minister's 'secretaries) told everything that he could remember as soon as the

meeting was over, for the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Times* published on Wednesday morning circumstantial descriptions—obviously from the same source—of the speeches and the diverse attitudes of the Ministers. From these unofficial—though never repudiated—reports it is evident that the criticism of Monday's and Tuesday's Press was to some extent reflected in the meeting. Mr. Lloyd George at once adapted himself to it. As the London correspondent of the *Glasgow Herald* put it, Mr. Lloyd George has a keen sense of political atmosphere, and before he had embarked very far upon his opening speech he could be seen to be moving cautiously among suspected rocks.

At the same time, the Prime Minister's delicate and dexterous handling of his fellow Ministers did not prevent them from seeing what was in his mind. "His colleagues," said the *Glasgow Herald*, "saw plainly that amalgamation was the goal aimed at." Some of the Ministers welcomed the prospect with enthusiasm. "One of the strongest advocates of amalgamation," we are told, "was Dr. Addison, who thought the moment ripe for developing the Coalition into a permanent party." "Mr. Churchill," again, "proclaimed himself to be a convinced fusionist." On the other hand, Mr. Fisher wanted only temporary amalgamation, with a five years' limit.

None of the Liberal Ministers appeared to feel

any objection to fusion with the Conservative Party on his own account, or on any ground of principle. The difficulties that were raised were practical and strategic. Some were reluctant to surrender the name "Liberal"; and on this, Mr. Churchill admitted that the word still "carried with it a good deal of political goodwill." Others, particularly the Scottish Ministers, declared that they could not count on carrying their local Associations with them into the Tory Party. Others, again, thought that "fusion" would be more easily accomplished if another name could be invented for it. On the whole, with much shaking of heads and wagging of fingers, the Prime Minister was implored to be "cautious" and to "go slowly."

In his reply to the discussion Mr. Lloyd George treated his nervous followers as a wise doctor treats a trembling patient in face of an operation. He made light of it. He spoke gently and soothingly. He knew, of course, that he held every one of them in his hand. When the time came they would go with him; even though some of them might be in the very act of declaring with their mouths that they could never do so, their feet would be taking them with him nevertheless. He knew this from experience.

He told them that the word "fusion" was "a bad word," and that he had not intended to use it. What he sought was closer co-operation of the

Coalition forces in the constituencies. No Coalitionist could object to that. None of them did. Having thus brought his victims to a state of quietness and passivity, he began deftly to wind cords about them by suggesting that "a first step towards co-operation" might be the "adoption of a common name." He asked them what name they would prefer. It was really for them to say. They might be called National Democrats, or perhaps they would rather be National Reformers. And there need be no heartache over the word "Liberal," because, whilst the other section of the party would be Unionist National Reformers, they themselves would be Liberal National Reformers. For the rest, he assured them that they need not fear that he would be precipitate in his speech to the Liberal Coalition Members on Thursday. "He would point out to them," so runs the *Times* report, "the difficulties of the Coalition position in the country, but would not ask them to decide on the remedy at once. What he would suggest was that they should take time to think over the possible courses of securing better co-operation and come back in a few weeks' time with their suggestions. Then another meeting might be called, and he would be prepared to take the matter a stage further."

Meeting of the Coalition Liberal Members.

These reports appeared in the *Times* and the *Glasgow Herald* on March 17th, and were reproduced by every evening newspaper in the country. On the following morning (Thursday, March 18th) Mr. Lloyd George made his speech to a full meeting of Coalition Liberal Members of Parliament in the Grand Committee Room, Westminster Hall. An official report of the proceedings of the meeting was issued, and appeared in the newspapers the same evening and on Friday morning.

It was thought by some people that this speech was an anti-climax, that there was nothing in it, and that it would lead to nothing. But this is to misunderstand Mr. Lloyd George's methods and to under-rate his abilities. It is true that there was nothing new in the speech. Those parts of it that dealt with the future of the Coalition may be briefly summarised as follows :

Coalition of some kind is unavoidable, for none of the parties is strong enough in itself to govern. The danger that faces the country is the doctrine of the common ownership of property. In France it is called Communism, in Germany it is called Socialism, in Russia it is called Bolshevism. It is the same thing, and it is represented here by the Labour Party. Civilisation is in jeopardy in every land. This is the peril. We can only fight and defeat it by a combination of parties. For this purpose we need a thorough and efficient organization. We must

have in the constituencies closer co-operation between the two wings of the Coalition.

This argument, besides being very familiar, is perhaps somewhat experimental and mild in tone. It may seem to fall a good way behind the *Observer's* "conversion of the Coalition into a fusion," and the *Times's* "amalgamation of the two wings of the Coalition into one party." It only does so in superficial form. The primary fact to be borne in mind is that Mr. Lloyd George's whole object in this meeting was to preserve a mild, tentative, and persuasive tone. The object of this meeting was not to adopt a formal constitution for the new party. It was no doubt Mr. Lloyd George's original hope that something of that kind might have been done. But there had been in the meantime the criticism of the Press and the appeal of the Ministers for caution and delay. Mr. Lloyd George had now recognised the fact that his plans must be carried through in two or three stages instead of in one. His object at this moment, therefore, was to dispel alarm, to preserve harmony among his followers, and above all to nurse their fanatical belief in himself as a disinterested Liberal idealist.

Regarded in this light, the speech was a work of art. The reference to "closer co-operation" was deliberately 'brief; just enough was said, as will be shown presently, to commit those who

heard it and made no protest; but it was said almost casually. The Labour Party was masqueraded in the clothes of Bolshevism, thirsting for blood and the downfall of civilisation. There was the familiar appeal to pity and admiration, the appeal of a tired man who still stands at his post for the sake of a cause.

“Personally,” said Mr. Lloyd George, “I am not concerned with the future; I have had fifteen years of the hardest work almost any man ever had, in every kind of office and in every kind of weather; and if any change of the political conditions could give me a respite, I would rejoice in it—”

Evidently observing in the faces of his audience signs that this might be taken too literally, he paused and added:

“not that I feel my strength failing, thank God.”

This assurance that the idea of a “respite” was only pleasant talk, and not meant seriously, brought general applause; and, thus encouraged, the Prime Minister took it up again:

“—not that I feel my strength failing, thank God. (Cheers.) But I would like it. I have got to a place I never thought of getting to. I tell you this on my honour, that I have got to a place I never sought. I was put there by events over which I had no control, and I have only tried to do my duty.”

This passage is worthy to be placed by the side of the speeches of Brutus and Mark Antony. It is a model. It exhibits the complete demagogue.

Even its conventional phrasing—"I have only tried to do my duty"—is the instinctive conventionality of successful melodrama.

But besides all this the speech contained passages—resting, indeed, for the most part on half-truths, and treating as achievements what were only rhetorical promises—in which the intention was to display Mr. Lloyd George as the ideal Liberal of his age. Here are a few detached sentences :

"I may say Peace is our first purpose—a real peace, not a snarling peace, not a scowling peace, but a real peace. . . . That is why we put disarmament in the forefront of our Treaty, in the forefront of our League of Nations. . . . We want peace in the East and peace in the West, peace abroad and peace at home. . . . Peace on earth and goodwill amongst men is not merely a great gospel, it is the soundest of political economies. . . . We mean to have a fair deal and a fair reward for individual effort. Individual enterprise should be encouraged, not destroyed. . . . But the best protection for the present system is to improve it. A system which encourages the strong man to put forth his strength produces wealth for itself, but it is apt if it is unchecked to become ruthless to the weak and even to the average. Unchecked individualism in this country is responsible for slums, sweating, prolonged hours of toil, child labour, and for starvation in periods of misfortune. . . . That is why we are engaged at the present moment in these great measures of reform. . . . I am a Liberal because I believe in liberty. It is for that reason I have fought despotism, whether it came from an autocracy in Germany or from an autocracy

at home ; and I do not care what the autocracy is. . . .”
And so on.

People who despise speeches of this kind would despise the sunset because its gorgeous colours have no substance, but are a product of mirage, a species of atmospheric deception. The same thing can be said of Mr. Lloyd George’s speech to the Coalition Liberals ; but, like the sunset, it fascinated and delighted those who regarded it. This was the object of the speech.

As to the plan for amalgamating the two wings of the Coalition into one party, Mr. Lloyd George considered this settled. He had some right to do so. For observe where he stood on this 18th day of March. (1) Between himself, for the one part, and Sir George Younger and Mr. Bonar Law, for the other part, the terms of amalgamation had been agreed and signed. This cannot be doubted. Both parties to the deal had publicly declared themselves in favour of it : Sir George Younger in October and in January, as related on previous pages, and Mr. Lloyd George on March 16th, when he discussed the point of a suitable name for the new party. It is too much to ask us to believe that the heads of two elaborate and wealthy party-machines, men who were working and consulting together day by day in a temporary union, would publicly advocate the permanent amalgamation of the two

machines unless they had already agreed in private upon its desirability and upon mutually satisfactory terms. (2) This plan had been carefully allowed to leak out in the course of many months. (3) On the eve of the events of this week the *Observer*, the newspaper that had the confidence of Mr. Lloyd George's immediate circle, had been allowed to say emphatically that the whole matter was settled. (4) In his conference with the Liberal Ministers on Tuesday, although by this time picking his way somewhat carefully, Mr. Lloyd George had plainly revealed his own attitude and intentions in speaking, as mentioned above, of a new party-name. Should it be called the National Democratic Party, or the National Reform Party? To ask this question exhibits the plan at an advanced stage. What use was there for a new name unless there was to be a new party?

Now all this was known on March 18th, and was before the mind of every Coalition Liberal Member who listened to the Prime Minister's speech on that day. Mr. Lloyd George knew that it was. He counted upon it. It was not necessary for him to enlarge upon the plan of amalgamation; they were fully aware of it. Mr. Lloyd George knew also that some of them were apprehensive and nervous; and he was wise enough to confine the actual confirmation of what had been

already laid down to the fewest possible words. He said :

"We need a thorough and efficient organization."

Who needed this organization ? The Coalition ; the Coalition as a whole. The two wings of it required to be thoroughly and efficiently organized as a Coalition. And he said this also :

"It is essential there should be a closer co-operation."

There had already been co-operation. At the general election and in numerous bye-elections the two wings of the Coalition had acted like one party ; they shared the offices and emoluments of the same Government ; they acknowledged the leadership of the same Prime Minister. If co-operation was to be "closer" it could only be by formal amalgamation into one thoroughly and efficiently organized party.

Mr. Lloyd George was fully conscious that all this was implied in his brief references to the central, if somewhat hidden, subject of the conference. He did not want to extract anything like a formal pledge. He knew that if this much was allowed to pass, after all that had gone before, the Liberal Coalitionists were committed to the whole plan—however many steps might be required to complete the journey. What he laboured for in this meeting, therefore, was to hold his audience together. If he could prevent

them from walking out, if he could avert any kind of rebellion or protest, he would be victorious. The speech that he delivered was conceived and fashioned for this purpose. It was a kind of oratorical chloroform, concocted with expert knowledge, and administered with the delicate and sensitive touch of a master in the art of illusion. And it was successful. As the patients inhaled the magic fumes they saw splendid visions, and melted under beautiful emotions of unselfish service and comradeship. They did not walk out; they uttered no protest. They thanked the Prime Minister for his "sincerity" and his "frankness," and said how "very much delighted" they were. And the Prime Minister came away with a hundred Liberal Members of Parliament in his pocket—a handsome contribution to the common stock of the new party.

On the day after Mr. Lloyd George's meeting—that is, on Friday, March 19th—Mr. Bonar Law went to Worthing and addressed the united Conservative Associations of Sussex. It is only necessary to note that he put before the Conservative wing of the Coalition the same advice and the same appeal as Mr. Lloyd George had put to the Liberal wing. After speaking at length of the successful association of Tories and Liberals in the Coalition, Mr. Bonar Law said :

"I believe that it cannot continue unless by some method we can get united action in the constituencies, as well as in the House of Commons . . . What we have to do is to try and get closer co-operation. I say I have discussed this with the Prime Minister, and I do not think even he or I understand the intricacies of party working in the constituencies half so well as many of those who support us. . . . I think we must take a further step. I do not suggest for a moment that that means that we are to sink our old party organizations on either side, but it does mean that something must be done ; and my own belief is—and I think the Prime Minister shares it—it is our duty as leaders to suggest that some effort should be made to have this closer co-operation."

The Inside View.

So ended this eventful week. What was the total result of it? It is interesting to inquire what view of the total result was taken by the *Observer*, with its inside Coalition knowledge and its strong bias in Mr. Lloyd George's favour. The view of the *Observer* on these events may be taken to be more or less the view of the Coalition inner circle. On the Sunday--March 21st--this newspaper printed a long article on the situation. "What a week," the article begins, "for a Greville, and still more what a week for a Creevey. . . . It has been one of the most curious and amusing weeks in all the centuries of English politics, and incomparable for the ironist. There have been stiff hitches in the programme. Many

good souls have momentarily flinched from performing in public what they approved in private. Some who were in favour of doing it eventually have shrunk from doing it now." A little later the writer speaks of the Prime Minister's personal position. "When they say he has not crossed the Rubicon, they never made a more patent mistake in their lives. He is fairly over. He crossed it very quietly. . . . As a scene it was an anti-climax. It was almost as though the man of combat and plan had gone over by himself in the night, leaving his followers to come after with their precious baggage. . . . But as regards himself, it is just as we foretold. He has unmistakably taken all his risk and done the thing once and for ever ; and politics in this country will never again be the same."

Allowing for the pardonable exaggeration of the last ten words, there seems little reason to quarrel with this description. And when, some distance onward in the article, the writer comes to the immediate practical consequences of the week's oratory, he is both accurate and illuminating. "The effect," says he, "of all these different jibbings and reserves and searchings of heart can be explained in a very few words. There is universal agreement on one thing. The Coalition organization is fundamentally defective, and must be improved. . . . There must be closer co-operation between the two wings of

the Coalition. There must be a *solid alliance*, whether fusion comes or not. . . . There must be in London a united General Staff and G.H.Q. . . . That is the main thing. The local arrangements would be different. The present dualism would persist. Liberals and Unionists supporting the Government and its system of progress and order would keep their sacred names. But in every constituency they would form Joint Committees. . . . All this would be an improvement. The bye-elections of the next few months will show whether it is a sufficient improvement or whether anything further is required. *If closer alliance does not give the right fighting results, the solid amalgamation will doubtless follow.*"

There is here no concealment of the impatience and indeed contempt which Mr. Lloyd George and his lieutenants felt for the attachment of local party associations to their "sacred names." To men who had determined that politics in this country should "never again be the same" these scruples were a small matter. But the passage just quoted is on the whole a fair summary of what had happened. It is also an instructive interpretation of the Lloyd George view of what was likely to happen in the future. If at the moment the "solid amalgamation" was not practicable, a fair trial would be given to the "solid alliance," with a united General Staff in

London and Joint Committees in every constituency; but let it be pondered by all concerned: if the "solid alliance" did not yield the right fighting results, the "solid amalgamation" must take its place.

The Effect on Liberal Opinion.

But what was the effect of this pregnant week on the Liberal Party—on the mass of ordinary Liberal people? The average Liberal was not much concerned with the difference between the "solid alliance" and the "solid amalgamation," nor even with the difference between "closer co-operation" and "fusion." He took a very simple and straight view of the situation. He regarded the events of this week as a final proof that Mr. Lloyd George had bound himself to the leaders of the Tory Party. For the past two years Liberals had been asking the question, "Which way is Mr. Lloyd George going? Will he come back to Liberalism, or will he go over to Toryism?" Everything that happened, from the general election onward, pointed to the answer. But the average Liberal is a long-suffering person where old colleagues are concerned; and a few people here and there were still to be heard repeating the question. After this week it was never heard again.

The rank-and-file Liberals took little interest in the precise date at which the Coalition would

assume its new party-name. They did not care whether it ever did so. They were aware that in the end Mr. Lloyd George might fail to get the "solid amalgamation"; that large blocks of Tory Associations might remain outside; and that when the new party was finally constituted, the number of Tory Coalitionists in it might not be much greater than the number of Liberal Coalitionists. These possible variations in the final result did not affect the judgment of the rank-and-file Liberals. What impressed them was the obvious fact that the Liberal section of the Coalition had decided *to go the wrong way*. In the meeting of March 18th they saw two things with crystalline distinctness. They saw that Mr. Lloyd George intended to continue and as far as possible to consolidate his alliance with the Tory Party; and they saw that in this purpose he would carry the Coalition Liberal Members of Parliament with him.

The apprehension of these solid and serious facts did not fill Liberals with alarm for the future of their cause. Although the loss, now known to be irretrievable, of a substantial section of the party was not regarded lightly, there was a certain sense of relief in at last knowing the truth. Liberals saw that they would have to build up their party again, as it had been built up more than once before, by patience and devotion; and they were not afraid of the task.

But they were angry. It is not too much to

say that there swept through the Liberal Associations of Great Britain a wave of hatred for the men who had forsaken the cause. And, curiously enough, it settled more fiercely upon the Prime Minister's followers than upon the Prime Minister himself. It was felt that Mr. Lloyd George was playing a great game, if a selfish one. For him the stakes were high. And he knew what he was doing. He knew what a selfish game it was. He deliberately threw aside every principle upon which he had been nurtured, and with his eyes open took all the risks of moral and political outlawry, like a reckless and brazen captain of footpads. But it was believed that the men who followed him were for the most part his tools. Even those who knew, as he did, the nature of the enterprise were content to embark upon it for petty rewards. There were little men among them, men who could never have hoped for office in a Liberal Ministry. Less than two years earlier some of these had protested with tears and anguish that they could never bring themselves to forsake the straight road of political honesty. Yet they had brought themselves to it for the sake of small distinctions which they knew would never come to them in any other way. But many of Mr. Lloyd George's followers were only half aware of what they were doing. In the very act of their betrayal they called heaven to witness that they would not do it if any one could show them that it was wrong.

They were not only lacking in courage; they were muddle-headed. They sacrificed principle without having a clear reason, even a clear bad reason. They were vague philanderers, easy victims, submitting half-consciously to be led by the nose into the Tory tents.

For these men the Liberal rank and file expressed a blunt and angry contempt. The Associations began immediately to call meetings and pass resolutions. What the average Liberal wanted after the meeting of March 18th was the earliest possible opportunity to say publicly, "We can have nothing to do with the Prime Minister's plan"; or, "We repudiate the proposal for alliance with the Conservative Party"; or, "The Liberal Party is an independent political body; Liberalism is a principle, it is a great cause; and we intend to maintain it as a separate force fighting for liberty and progress."

With varying phraseology this uncompromising attitude found expression in a large number of Liberal Associations during the next few weeks. It was a spontaneous movement. It gathered force from day to day and rapidly grew to a white heat of wrath, until on May 7th it let itself loose in the Leamington meeting of the National Liberal Federation.

The verbal duel between Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George which intervened hardly

affected the situation. Mr. Asquith promptly took up the Prime Minister's challenge in a speech delivered to a representative Liberal assembly in the National Liberal Club on March 24th. But the only part of the speech to which the general Liberal public paid much attention was this passage:

"The real point," said Mr. Asquith, "is whether or not you are going to respond to this invitation. . . Are you going to link yourselves with the Tory organizations?"

To this Mr. Asquith himself replied in an emphatic negative. And for the average Liberal this was enough. He felt that he did not need argument. What was required at that moment was the short word "No," uttered as loudly as possible. When Mr. Lloyd George took the field two days later, and replied to Mr. Asquith in a long, bantering speech, nobody even laughed, except his own immediate followers—for whom, perhaps, the speech was intended. These things passed over the Liberal Party almost unnoticed, like showers of rain over an army in action. Liberals felt that a clear-cut issue had been raised between themselves and Mr. Lloyd George's Coalition; they knew what the issue was without further words; they had made up their minds; they were anxious to cast their votes, and they went to Leamington for this purpose.

CHAPTER V.

LEAMINGTON—AND AFTER.

THE meeting at Leamington on May 7th was a meeting of the General Committee of the National Liberal Federation. The General Committee consists of the Executive Committee, the Liberal Members of both Houses of Parliament, and delegates appointed by the local Liberal Associations in all parts of England and Wales. There were about five hundred people present, nearly four hundred of whom were delegates elected by local Liberal Associations, and sent to the meeting as representatives of the rank and file of the Liberal Party. Among the others were about sixty Coalition Liberal Members of Parliament.

The Agenda for the meeting, which had been circulated some time previously, contained a resolution on Mr. Lloyd George's proposal for closer co-operation with the Conservative Party. Although it is somewhat long, this resolution must be recorded here in full. It is as follows :

“ That this General Committee of the National Liberal Federation approves and adopts the following resolution of the Executive Committee of March 24th last, namely :

“That this Executive of the National Liberal Federation, at its first meeting since the declaration of the result of the Paisley bye-election, welcomes Mr. Asquith’s return to the House of Commons, and reaffirms its unabated confidence in him as leader of the Liberal Party.

It declines the invitation extended to Liberals by the Prime Minister to enter into ‘closer co-operation’ with the Conservative Party, believing

(a) That the war-time necessity for a Coalition of political parties no longer exists;

(b) That the continuance of such a Coalition is impossible except at the sacrifice of principle, is calculated to mislead the electors, and is therefore contrary to the National interest;

(c) That to promote an unreal alliance between Liberals and Conservatives for the alleged purpose of fighting Socialism is certain to aggravate and precipitate class warfare, to which true Liberalism must always be opposed.

The Executive Committee urges the Affiliated Liberal Associations to employ every effort to maintain the independence of the historic Liberal Party and the efficiency of their organizations, and warns Liberals everywhere, but especially in constituencies represented to-day by Coalition Liberals, to be on their guard against insidious proposals to suspend or disband their party organization, and to force them into an alliance with the Conservative Party by whatever name it may be called—a course which, if followed, can in the long run only result in handing over those constituencies either to Toryism or to Labour.’

The General Committee desires to emphasise the request and the warning of the Executive Committee to the Affiliated Associations as expressed in the last

paragraph of the foregoing resolution, and the delegates now present pledge themselves to use their utmost efforts to maintain the independence and efficiency of the Liberal Organizations which they represent."

The substance of this resolution is (1) a repudiation of the proposal for closer co-operation with Conservatives, and (2) an appeal to Liberals to maintain the independence of their party organizations. The Coalition Liberal Members of Parliament chose to regard it as intended to "excommunicate" them from the Liberal Party. But obviously it does nothing of the kind—apart from their own will and choice. If a Coalition Liberal feels himself excommunicated by the fact that the Liberal Party determines to continue to be what it always has been (an independent organization), it must be he himself, and not the Party, who is departing upon a new course. It is to be borne in mind that the proposal for closer co-operation with Conservatives *had been made*. The proposal necessitated a response; and the natural response of the Liberal Party, the response made in this resolution, was to decline to have anything to do with the proposal. The Coalition Liberals were like men setting out on a journey and inviting others to go with them, and then turning round upon those who refused to go, exclaiming, "You are driving us away."

It cannot be said that the resolution was dis-

cussed. Both those who supported it and those who opposed it were immovably settled in their minds when they came to the meeting; and the mere sight of each other in the flesh, after all that had happened during the previous eighteen months, was so provocative that there was little chance for orderly debate. The disturbance began during the speech of Mr. Arthur Brampton, chairman of the General Committee, who moved the resolution, and it was continued almost without intermission by both sides.

But this was a matter of small importance. The debate on the resolution took place before the meeting; it had been conducted in public at full length for many weeks past. The complaint of the Coalitionists that they were not heard in their own defence is the shallowest sophism. The Prime Minister had stated their case in half-a-dozen speeches. They had stated it themselves both in print and by word of mouth. It was well known to every one in the meeting. And the Coalition Ministers who tried to speak at Leamington—Dr. Addison, Mr. Macnamara, and Mr. Kellaway—had been “heard” in another sense, to which the delegates attached importance: they had been heard in West Leyton, in Plymouth, in the Spenn Valley, and at other bye-elections, where they had urged the electors to vote against Liberal candidates.

There was no necessity for further speeches. It might have been mildly interesting to hear them; but the important thing on this occasion was to take the vote on an issue that had been already exhaustively argued. The Coalition Liberal Members did not wait for the vote; fifty-seven of them walked out of the hall, accompanied by twenty supporters. When the resolution was afterwards put to the meeting, four delegates voted against it and nearly four hundred voted for it.

The Leamington meeting, with its emphatic repudiation of coalition by the responsible delegates of Liberal Associations, was in reality the last incident in the Liberal Party's successful struggle for independence. There was, however, an appendix to it which should be mentioned. Four days later, on May 11th, the Coalition Liberal Members of Parliament held a meeting in the Central Hall, Westminster, in order—as they said—to deliver the speeches which were not heard at Leamington. Nothing that was said in this meeting added a single fact or argument to the controversy. Mr. Lloyd George was not present, but he wrote a letter to the chairman.

This letter exhibits Mr. Lloyd George in yet another style of fancy-dress. It purports to be a paternal and reproving message from one who has unselfishly laboured for reconciliation and peace

among Liberals, and now finds all his kindness forgotten and his wise advice rejected by a set of thoughtless and heartless Liberal hooligans. "The present dissension is to me a source of grief," he says. "I should have been unfeignedly glad to postpone, even if I failed altogether to put off, any strife with men throughout the land with whom I had so long acted in concert." But "they are now attempting to excommunicate us from the Liberal Tabernacle." The pathos of these sentences would be more convincing if we knew nothing of Mr. Lloyd George's political history during the past two years—if there had been no coupon-election, no attack on Liberal candidates, no attempt to merge the Liberal Party in a "solid amalgamation" with Conservatives. Mr. Lloyd George has done about as much for the health and unity and peace of the Liberal Party as the late Emperor of Germany did for the health and unity and peace of Europe. What now worries both him and the ex-Kaiser is the troublesome habit of self-defence which reveals itself in people who are attacked. If the Liberal Party had not been capable of the Leamington resolution there would have been a sort of "peace," but it would have been the peace of death and extinction. Happily Liberalism had enough sincerity and vigour to save itself, although it may be with some damage and loss, from the

fate to which Mr. Lloyd George endeavoured to drive it; and the Leamington meeting was the outward and visible sign of its deliverance.

Conclusions.

The foregoing narrative is itself the most convincing statement of the Liberal case against the Coalition. It is the facts that speak.

When the course of events from November, 1918, to May, 1920, is followed consecutively, with due observance of the relation of each event to those which preceded it, which we have tried to assist in these pages, there is no escape from the conclusion that the entire responsibility for the disruption of the Liberal Party rests on the shoulders of Mr. Lloyd George and his friends. In the first instance, Mr. Lloyd George, swollen by the praise lavished upon him during the war, sought to whip the Liberal Party into a docile pack following at his heels. Having failed in this, he sought to kill it. Being thwarted once more by the inherent vitality of Liberalism, he set about to render it inoperative by a permanent combination of his own personal following with the Conservative Party.

And in all this it is not Liberalism as such that Mr. Lloyd George hates; he does not hate any principle or any policy. What he hates is the Liberalism that has dared to think for itself,

those Liberal men and women who have preferred their principles to the glamour of his leadership. From beginning to end this has been a personal issue to Mr. Lloyd George and his supporters. He claimed the right to direct the Liberal Party, and to exclude from Parliament those Liberals who refused to follow him. To the Liberal Party it has never been a personal issue. The Liberals who refused to follow and obey Mr. Lloyd George did not do so on personal grounds ; they had no personal objection to his premiership ; they refused to follow him because they differed from his opinions, because they believed that his actions imperilled the cause of Liberalism. The admiration of Liberals for Mr. Asquith is deservedly profound, and is of long standing ; but to the Liberal Party this has never been a fight for Mr. Asquith. If he had not existed, or had in some way finally retired from these scenes in the year 1915, the attitude of the Liberal Party to the Coalition and to Mr. Lloyd George would not have been different in any respect or particular. Although it is superfluous to say so, it may as well be said that to Mr. Asquith this has never been a fight for himself. For him and for the Liberal Party there has been no motive in this controversy except the preservation of Liberalism as a free and independent force. On the other hand, it will be admitted by every one as soon as the words are

uttered that if Mr. Lloyd George were to disappear to-morrow, the whole fabric of Coalition Liberalism—men, machine, and doctrine—would tumble to pieces like a child's house of bricks.

Mr. Lloyd George has not yet brought his cargo of schemes safely into port. It may be that the fondness of the Tory Associations for their "sacred names" will prove too obstinate, and that the "solid amalgamation" will never take place.

And Mr. Lloyd George has long been aware of this risk. In order to provide against it, he has built up an elaborate political organization for his personal use. As far back as the year 1917 a headquarters "Lloyd George" office was opened in London. In the summer and autumn of 1918 (many months before the general election) district organizers were employed in the areas known as the Home Counties, the Western Counties, the Midlands, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Northumberland and Durham, and the Eastern Counties. Scotland and Wales have since been added, and the staffs in all these areas have been greatly increased in number. It has been calculated that this organization costs no less than £70,000 a year. It has no name except that of its founder. Even its monthly magazine has to be called *The Lloyd George Magazine*. It is the machine of a personal party.

If in the last issue Mr. Lloyd George's designs upon the Conservative Party fail to mature, it is upon this organization that he will fall back. He will carry a certain number of Conservatives with him, in addition to his present Liberal following, and we shall see that sort of Centre Group—although of smaller dimensions—which was advertised by Mr. Churchill a year ago.

To the Liberal party it is the same in either case. The material fact is that Mr. Lloyd George has broken away and takes with him an undefined number of Liberals. There can be no doubt that his own preference is to take them into the Conservative Party. If the whole Liberal Party had responded to his invitation—which is what he professed to desire—the country would have been placed under complete Tory domination. As many as 382 seats in the House of Commons, a clear majority of the whole House, are now held by Tories; and “fusion” would have meant that no Liberal could stand for election in any of these 382 constituencies. In other words, “fusion” was a proposal to stereotype the present Tory majority for an indefinite period. If all Liberals had followed Mr. Lloyd George this is what would have happened. It was this invitation to be buried alive which the Liberal Party declined in the Leamington resolution.

It has been suggested, by way of hanging on

to some kind of rational theory, that Mr. Lloyd George has come to the conclusion that Liberalism can no longer exist in this country as a separate national force, and that the function of Liberal people in the future is not to oppose Conservatism from the outside, but to operate upon it from the inside as a sort of stimulating and suggestive leaven. It may be so. Mr. Lloyd George's recent manner of speech, particularly his theory that the present Coalition is a clever device for getting Liberal things done, lends plausibility to the suggestion. But this, again, is a theory of the function of Liberalism which the Liberal Party has rejected.

The central and potent fact which stands out in the controversy of the past two years is that the Liberal people believe in Liberalism. Their faith in it is not destroyed by the reverses of the coupon election. They are not dismayed by the prospect—if such is the prospect—of some years of slow and hard work in winning their way back to legislative power. Their object is not to hold office for the sake of office. They are not attracted by the invention of a clever formula under which divergent groups and interests may be combined, majorities manufactured, and Governments maintained in sterile security. These are not the things that occupy their minds. The almost delirious intensity with which Mr. Lloyd George

keeps his eye on the polling booth has made Liberals grow sick and weary.

Their interest is not in electioneering tactics, but in ideas. What they care for is liberty, justice, equality. They believe that these great human and social boons are the natural right of every individual. It is in this that Liberalism differs from other political theories. Conservatism and Socialism are founded on class antipathy. Mr. Lloyd George contemplates a class-war as the primary occupation of his new party. But every form of class antagonism is hateful to the Liberal. It is more hateful to him than to other politicians because the source from which his whole political theory springs is belief in the value of individual liberty for its own sake, as a good in itself, and an indestructible conviction that this liberty is the right of every human being. This is the point from which the Liberal approaches all the problems of national life. His aim is to adjust the conditions of national life so as to provide for all, without distinction of class or rank or wealth, the largest possible amount of individual liberty.

The Liberal Party cannot barter these passionate beliefs for a material advantage. Electoral victories, office, power, patronage—these are dreary forms of success unless they carry also the opportunity to put genuine Liberal ideas into practice. For this opportunity Liberals are pre-

pared both to work and to wait. If it does not come to-day, it will come to-morrow. For Liberalism is not a brief expedient; it is not a passing phase of contemporary politics. It is a living force in the mind of the world. It comes on like a gathering tide, wave by wave, with here and there an obstructing rock around which the tide swirls year after year; but it comes rolling on, creeping farther and farther over the wide beach. It is a movement of cleansing ideas, encroaching upon the dry life of humanity. Every Liberal knows that he is part of this irresistible tide. The talk of compromise, of the manipulation of groups, of new parties, of alliances and amalgamations, is like the noise of birds above the water, seagulls screaming in the aimless wind. The tide of Liberal thought moves on as though they were not there. The Liberal people are undisturbed. They are absorbed in their task, and confident in the final victory of their cause.

